

Advice to My Anarchist Comrades

Elisée Reclus

1901

Dear Comrades,

It is our usual habit to exaggerate both our strengths and our weaknesses. During revolutionary periods, it seems that the least of our actions has incalculably great consequences. On the other hand, during times of stagnation, even though we have dedicated ourselves completely to the cause, our lives seem barren and useless. We may even feel swept away by the winds of reaction.

What then should we do to maintain our intellectual vigor, our moral energy, and our faith in the good fight?

You come to me hoping to draw on my long experiences of people and things. So as an old man I give you the following advice.

Do not quarrel or deal in personalities. Listen to opposing arguments after you have presented your own. Learn how to remain silent and reflect. Do not try to get the better in an argument at the expense of your own sincerity.

Study with discretion and perseverance. Great enthusiasm and dedication to the point of risking one's life are not the only ways of serving a cause. It is easier to sacrifice one's life than to make one's whole life an education for others. The conscious revolutionary is not only a person of feeling, but also one of reason, for whom every effort to promote justice and solidarity rests on precise knowledge and on a comprehensive understanding of history, sociology, and biology. Such a person can incorporate his personal ideas into the larger context of the human sciences, and can brave the struggle, sustained by the immense power he gains through his broad knowledge.

Avoid specialization. Side neither with nations nor with parties. Be neither Russians, Poles nor Slavs. Rather, be men who hunger for truth, free from any thoughts of particular interests, and from speculative ideas concerning the Chinese, Africans or Europeans. The patriot always ends up hating the foreigner, and loses the sense of justice that once kindled his enthusiasm.

Away with all bosses, leaders, and those apostles of language who turn words into Sacred Scripture. Avoid idolatry and value the words even of your closest friend or the wisest professor only for the truth that you find in them. If, having listened, you have some doubts, turn inward toward your own mind and re-examine the matter before making a final judgement.

So you should reject every authority, but also commit yourself to a deep respect for all sincere convictions. Live your own life, but also allow others the complete freedom to live theirs.

If you throw yourself into the fray to sacrifice yourself defending the humiliated and down-trodden, that is a very good thing, my companions. Face death nobly. If you prefer to take on slow and patient work on behalf of a better future, that is an even better thing. Make it the goal of every instant of a generous life. But if you choose to remain poor among the poor, in complete solidarity with those who suffer, may your life shine forth as a beneficent light, a perfect example, a fruitful lesson for all!

Greetings, comrades.

Elisée Reclus.

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An Anarchist on Anarchy

Elisée Reclus

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“It is a pity that such men as Elisée Reclus cannot be promptly shot.”
— Providence Press

I

To most Englishmen, the word *Anarchy* is so evil-sounding that ordinary readers of the *Contemporary Review* will probably turn from these pages with aversion, wondering how anybody could have the audacity to write them. With the crowd of commonplace chatterers we are already past praying for; no reproach is too bitter for us, no epithet too insulting. Public speakers on social and political subjects find that abuse of Anarchists is an unfailing passport to public favor. Every conceivable crime is laid to our charge, and opinion, too indolent to learn the truth, is easily persuaded that Anarchy is but another name for wickedness and chaos. Overwhelmed with opprobrium and held up with hatred, we are treated on the principle that the surest way of hanging a dog is to give it a bad name.

There is nothing surprising in all this. The chorus of imprecations with which we are assailed is quite in the nature of things, for we speak in a tongue unhallowed by usage, and belong to none of the parties that dispute the possession of power. Like all innovators, whether they be violent or pacific, we bring not peace but a sword, and are nowise astonished to be received as enemies.

Yet it is not with light hearts that we incur so much ill-will, nor are we satisfied with merely knowing that it is undeserved. To risk the loss of so precious an advantage as popular sympathy without first patiently searching out the truth and carefully considering our duty would be an act of reckless folly. To a degree never dreamt of by men who are born unresistingly on the great current of public opinion, are we bound to render to our conscience a reason for the faith that is in us, to strengthen our convictions by study of nature and mankind, and, above all, to compare them with that ideal justice which has been slowly elaborated by the untold generations of the human race. This ideal is known to all, and is almost too trite to need repeating. It exists in the moral teaching of every people, civilized or savage; every religion has tried to adapt it to its dogmas and precepts, for it is the ideal of equality of rights and reciprocity of services. “We are all brethren,” is a saying repeated from one end of the world to the other, and the principle of universal brotherhood expressed in this saying implies a complete solidarity of interests and efforts.

Accepted in its integrity by simple souls, does not this principle seem to imply as a necessary consequence the social state formulated by modern socialists: “From each according to ability, to each according to needs”? Well, we are simple souls, and we hold firmly to this ideal of human morality. Of a surety there is much dross mixed with the pure metal, and the personal and collective egoisms of families, cities, castes, peoples, and parties have wrought on this groundwork some startling variations. But we have not to do here with the ethics of selfish interests, it is enough to identify the central point of convergence towards which all partial ideas more or less tend. This focus of gravitation is justice. If humanity be not a vain dream, if all our impressions, all our thoughts, are not pure hallucinations, one capital fact dominates the history of humanity — that every kindred and people yearns after justice. The very life of humanity is but one long cry for that fraternal equity which still remains unattained. Listen to the words, uttered nearly three thousand years ago, of old Hesiod, answering beforehand all those who contend that the

struggle for existence dooms us to eternal strife. "Let fishes, the wild beasts and birds, devour one and other — but our law is justice."

Yet how vast is the distance that still separates us from the justice invoked by the poet in the very dawn of history! How great is the progress we have still to make before we may rightfully cease comparing ourselves with wild creatures fighting for a morsel of carrion! It is in vain that we pretend to be civilized, if civilization be that which Mr. Alfred R. Wallace has described as "the harmony of individual liberty with the collective will." It is really too easy to criticize contemporary society, its morals, its conventions, and its laws, and to show how much its practices fall short of the ideal justice formulated by thinkers and desired by peoples. To repeat stale censures is to risk having called mere disclaimers, scatters of voices in the market-place. And yet so long as the truth is not heard, is it not our duty to go on speaking it in season and out of season? A sincere person owes it to themselves to expose the frightful barbarity which still prevails in the hidden depths of a society so outwardly well-ordered. Take, for instance, our great cities, the leaders of civilization, especially the most populous, and, in many respects, the first of all — the immense London, which gathers to herself the riches of the world, whose every warehouse is worth a king's ransom; where are to be found enough, and more than enough, of food and clothing for the needs of the teeming millions that throng her streets in greater numbers than the ants which swarm in the never-ending labyrinth of their subterranean galleries. And yet the wretched who cast longing and hungry eyes on those hoards of wealth may be counted by the hundred thousand; by the side of untold splendors, want is consuming the vitals of entire populations, and it is only at times that the fortunate for whom these treasures are amassed hear, as a muffled wailing, the bitter cry which rises eternally from those unseen depths. Below the London of fashion is a London accursed, a London whose only food are dirt-stained fragments, whose only garments are filthy rags, and whose only dwellings are fetid dens. Have the disinherited the consolation of hope? No: they are deprived of all. There are some among them who live and die in dampness and gloom without once raising their eyes to the sun.

What boots it to the wretched outcast, burning with fever or craving for bread, that the Book of the Christians opens the doors of heaven more widely to them than to the rich! Besides their present misery, all these promises of happiness, even if they heard them, would seem the bitterest irony. Does it not appear, moreover, — judging by the society in which the majority of preachers of the Gospel most delight, — that the words of Jesus are reversed, that the "Kingdom of God" is the guerdon of the fortunate of this world, — a world where spiritual and temporal government are on the best of terms, and religion leads as surely to earthly power as to heavenly bliss? "Religion is a cause for preferment, irreligion a bar to it," as a famous commentator of the Bible, speaking to his sovereign, said it ought to be.

When ambition thus finds its account in piety, and hypocrites practice religion in order to give what they are pleased to call their conscience a higher mercantile value, is it surprising that the great army of the hopeless should forget the way to the church? Do they deceive themselves in thinking that, despite official invitations, they would not always be well received in the "houses of God"? Without speaking here of churches whose sittings are sold at a price, where you may enter only purse in hand, is it nothing to the poor to feel themselves arrested on the threshold by the cold looks of well-clad men and the tightened lips of elegant women? True, no wall bars the passage, but an obstacle still more formidable stops the way, — the dark atmosphere of hatred and disgust which rises between the disinherited and the world's elect.

Yet the first word uttered by the minister when he stand stands up in the pulpit is “Brethren,” a word which, by a characteristic differentiation, has come to mean no more than a sort of potential and theoretic fraternity without practical reality. Nevertheless, its primitive sense has not altogether perished, and if the outcast that hears it be not stupefied by hunger, if he be not one of those boneless beings who repeat idiotically all they hear, what bitter thoughts will be suggested by this word “brethren” coming from the lips of men who feel so little its force! The impressions of my childhood surge back into my mind. When I heard for the first time an earnest and eager voice beseech the “Father who is in heaven” to give us “our daily bread,” it seemed to me that by a mysterious act a meal would descend from on high on all the tables of the world. I imagined that these words, repeated millions of times, were a cry of human brotherhood, and that each, in uttering them, thought of all. I deceived myself. With some, the prayer is sincere; with the greater part it is but an empty sound, a gust of wind like that which passes through the reeds.

Governments at least talk not to the poor about fraternity; they do not torment them with so sorry a jest. It is true that in some countries the jargon of courts compare the Sovereign to a father whose subjects are his children, and upon whom he pours the inexhaustible dews of his love; but this formula, which the hungry might abuse by asking for bread, is no longer taken seriously. So long as Governments were looked upon as direct representatives of a heavenly Sovereign, holding their powers by the grace of God, the comparison was legitimate; but there are very few now that make any claim to this quasi-divinity. Shorn of the sanctions of religion, they no longer hold themselves answerable for the general weal, contenting themselves instead with promising good administration, impartial justice, and strict economy in the administration of public affairs. Let history tell how these promises have been kept. Nobody can study contemporary politics without being struck by the truth of the words attributed alike to Oxenstjerna and Lord Chesterfield: “Go, my son, and see with how little the world is governed!” It is now a matter of common knowledge that power, whether its nature be monarchic, aristocratic, or democratic, whether it be based on the right of the sword, of inheritance, or of election, is wielded by individuals neither better nor worse than their fellows, but whose position exposes them to greater temptations to do evil. Raised above the crowd, whom they soon learn to despise, they end by considering themselves as essentially superior beings; solicited by ambition in a thousand forms, by vanity, greed, and caprice, they are all the more easily corrupted that a rabble of interested flatterers is ever on the watch to profit by their vices. And possessing as they do a preponderant influence in all things, holding the powerful lever whereby is moved the immense mechanism of the State — functionaries, soldiers, and police — every one of their oversights, their faults, or their crimes repeats itself to infinity and magnifies as it grows. It is only too true: a fit of impatience in a Sovereign, a crooked look, an equivocal word, may plunge nations into mourning and be fraught with disaster for mankind. English readers, brought up to a knowledge of Biblical lore, will remember the striking parable of the trees who wanted a king [Judges 9:8]. The peaceful trees and the strong, those who love work and whom man blesses; the olive that makes oil, the fig-tree that grows good fruit, the vine that produces wine, “which cheereth God and man,” refuse to reign; the bramble accepts, and of that noxious briar is born the flame which devours the cedars of Lebanon.

But these depositaries of power who are charged, whether by right divine or universal suffrage, with the august mission of dispensing justice, can they be considered as in any way more infallible, or even impartial? Can it be said that the laws and their interpreters shows towards all people the ideal equity as it exists in popular conception? Are the judges blind when there come

before them the wealthy and the poor — Shylock, with his murderous knife, and the unfortunate who has sold beforehand pounds of their flesh or ounces of their blood? Hold they always even scales between the king's son and the beggar's brat? That these magistrates should firmly believe in their own impartiality and think themselves incarnate right in human shape, is quite natural; everyone puts on — sometimes without knowing it — the peculiar morality of their calling; yet, judges, no more than priests, can withstand the influence of their surroundings. Their sense of what constitutes justice, derived from the average opinion of the age, is insensibly modified by the prejudices of their class. How honest soever they may be, they cannot forget that they belong to the rich and powerful, or to those, less fortunate, who are still on the look-out for preferment and honor. They are moreover blindly attached to precedent, and fancy that practices inherited from their forerunners must needs be right. Yet when we examine official justice without prejudice, how many inequities do we find in legal procedures! Thus the English are scandalized — and rightly so — by the French fashion of examining prisoners, those sacred beings who are in strict probity ought to be held innocent until they are proven guilty; while the French are disgusted, and not without reason, to see English justice, through the English Government, publicly encourage treachery by offers of impunity and money to the betrayer, thereby deepening the degradation of the debased and provoking acts of shameful meanness which children in their schools, more moral than their elders, regard with unfeigned horror.

Nevertheless, law, like religion, plays only a secondary part in contemporary society. It is invoked but rarely to regulate the relations between the poor and the rich, the powerful and the weak. These relations are the outcome of economic laws and the evolution of a social system based on inequality of conditions.

Laissez faire! Let things alone! have said the judges of the camp. Careers are open; and although the field is covered with corpses, although the conqueror stamps on the bodies of the vanquished, although by supply and demand, and the combinations and monopolies in which they result, the greater part of society becomes enslaved to the few, let things along — for thus has decreed fair play. It is by virtue of this beautiful system that a *parvenu*, without speaking of the great lord who receives counties as his heritage, is able to conquer with ready money thousands of acres, expel those who cultivate his domain, and replace people and their dwellings with wild animals and rare trees. It is thus that a tradesman, more cunning or intelligent, or, perhaps, more favored by luck than his fellows, is enabled to become master of an army of workers, and as often as not to starve them at his pleasure. In a word, commercial competition, under the paternal aegis of the law, lets the great majority of merchants — the fact is attested numberless medical inquests — adulterate provisions and drink, sell pernicious substances as wholesome food, and kill by slow poisoning, without for one day neglecting their religious duties, their brothers in Jesus Christ. Let people say what they will, slavery, which abolitionists strove so gallantly to extirpate in America, prevails in another form in every civilized country; for entire populations, placed between the alternatives of death by starvation and toils which they detest, are constrained to choose the latter. And if we would deal frankly with the barbarous society to which we belong, we must acknowledge that murder, albeit disguised under a thousand insidious and scientific forms, still, as in the times of primitive savagery, terminates the majority of lives. The economist sees around them but one vast field of carnage, and with the coldness of the statistician they count the slain as on the evening after a great battle. Judge by these figures. The mean mortality among the well-to-do is, at the utmost, one in sixty. Now the population of Europe being a third of a thousand millions, the average deaths, according to the rate of mortality among the fortunate, should not

exceed five millions. They are three times five millions! What have we done with these ten million human beings killed before their time? If it be true that we have duties, one towards the other, are we not responsible for the servitude, the cold, the hunger, the miseries of every sort, which doom the unfortunate to untimely deaths? Race of Cains, what have we done with our brothers and sisters?

And what are the remedies proposed for the social ills which are consuming the very marrow in our bones? Can charity, as assert many good souls — who are answered in chorus by a crowd of egoists — can charity by any possibility deal with so vast an evil? True, we know some devoted ones who seem to live only that they may do good. In England, above all, is this the case. Among childless women who are constrained to lavish their love on their kind are to be found many of those admirable beings whose lives are passed in consoling the afflicted, visiting the sick, and ministering the young. We cannot help being touched by the exquisite benevolence, the indefatigable solicitude shown by these ladies towards their unhappy fellow creatures; but, taken even in their entirety, what economic value can be attached to these well-meant efforts? What sum represents the charities of a year in comparison with the gains which hucksters of money and hawkers of loans oftentimes make by the speculations of a single day? While Ladies Bountiful are giving a cup of tea to a pauper, or preparing a potion for the sick, a father or brother, by a hardly stroke on the Stock Exchange or a successful transaction in produce, may reduce to ruin thousands of British workers or Hindu coolies. And how worthy of respect soever may be deeds of unobstantations charity, is it not the fact that the bestowal of alms is generally a matter of personal caprice, and that their distribution is too often influenced rather by political and religious sympathies of the giver than by the moral worth of the recipient? Even were help always given to those who most need it, charity would be none the less tainted with the capital vice, that it infallibly constitutes relations of inequality between the benefited and the benefactor. The latter rejoices in the consciousness of doing a good thing, as if they were not simply discharging a debt; and the former asks bread as a favor, when they should demand work as a right, or, if helpless, human solidarity. Thus are created and developed hideous mendacity with its lies, its tricks, and its base, heart-breaking hypocrisy. How much nobler are the customs of some so-called “barbarous countries” where the hungry person simply stops by the side of those who eat, is welcomed by all, and then, when satisfied, with a friendly greeting withdraws — remaining in every respect the equal of their host, and fretting under no painful sense of obligation for favors received! But charity breeds patronage and platitudes — miserable fruits of a wretched system, yet the best which a society of capitalists has to offer!

II

Hence we may say that, in letting those whom they govern — and the responsibility for whose fate they thereby accept — waste by want, sink under exposure, and deteriorate by vice, the leaders of modern society have committed moral bankruptcy. But where the masters have come short, free individuals may, perchance, succeed. The failure of governments is no reason why we should be discouraged; on the contrary, it shows us the danger of entrusting to others the guardianship of our rights, and makes us all the more firmly resolved to take our own cause into our own care. We are not among those whom the practice of social hypocrisies, the long weariness of a crooked life, and the uncertainty of the future have reduced to necessity of asking

ourselves — without daring to answer it — the sad question: “Is life worth living?” Yes, to us life does seem worth living, but on condition that it has an end — not personal happiness, not a paradise, either in this world or the next — but the realization of a cherished wish, an ideal that belongs to us and springs from our innermost conscience. We are striving to draw nearer to that ideal equality which, century after century, has hovered before subject peoples like a heavenly dream. The little that each of us can do offers an ample recompense for the perils of the combat. On these terms life is good, even a life of suffering and sacrifice — even though it may be cut short by premature death.

The first condition of equality, without which any other progress is merest mockery — the object of all socialists without exception — is that every human being shall have bread. To talk of duty, of renunciation, of eternal virtues to the famishing, is nothing less than cowardice. Dives has no right to preach morality to the beggar at his gates. If it were true that civilized lands did not produce food enough for all, it might be said that, by virtue of vital competition, bread should be reserved for the strong, and that the weak must content themselves with the crumbs that fall from the feasters’ tables. In a family where love prevails things are not ordered in this way; on the contrary, the small and the ailing receive the fullest measure; yet it is evident that dearth may strengthen the hands of the violent and make the powerful monopolizers of bread. But are our modern societies really reduced to these straits? On the contrary, whatever may be the value of Malthus’s forecast as to the distant future, it is an actual, incontestable fact that in the civilized countries of Europe and America the sum total of provisions produced, or received in exchange for manufacturers, is more than enough for the sustenance of the people. Even in times of partial dearth the granaries and warehouses have but to open their doors that every one may have a sufficient share. Notwithstanding waste and prodigality, despite the enormous losses arising from moving about and handling in warehouses and shops, there is always enough to feed generously all the world. And yet there are some who die of hunger! And yet there are fathers who kill their children because when the little ones cry for bread they have none to give them.

Others may turn their eyes from these horrors; we socialists look them full in the face, and seek out their cause. That cause is the monopoly of the soil, the appropriation by a few of the land which belongs to all. We Anarchists are not the only ones to say it: the cry for nationalization of the land is rising so high that all may hear it who do not willfully close their ears. The idea spreads fast, for private property, in its present form, has had its day, and historians are everywhere testifying that the old Roman law is not synonymous with eternal justice. Without doubt it were vain to hope that holders of the soil, saturated, so to speak, with ideas of caste, of privilege, and of inheritance, will voluntarily give back to all the bread-yielding furrows; the glory will not be theirs of joining as equals their fellow-citizens; but when public opinion is ripe — and day by day it grows — individuals will oppose in vain the general concourse of wills, and the axe will be applied to the upas tree’s roots. Arable land will be held once more in common; but instead of being ploughed and sown almost at hazard by ignorant hands, as it has hitherto been, science will aid us in the choice of climate, of soils, of methods of culture, of fertilizers, and of machinery. Husbandry will be guided by the same prescience as mechanical combinations and chemical operations; but the fruits of their toil will not be lost to the laborer. Many so-called savage societies hold their land in common, and humble though in our eyes they may seem, they are our betters in this: want among them is unknown. Are we, then, too ambitious in desiring

to attain a social state which shall add to the conquests of civilization the privileges of these primitive tribes? Through the education of our children we may to some extent fashion the future.

After we have bread for all, we shall require something more — equality of rights; but this point will soon be realized, for an individual who needs not incline themselves before their fellows to crave pittance is already their equal. Equality of conditions, which is in no way incompatible with the infinite diversity of human character, we already desire and look upon as indispensable, for it offers us the only means whereby a true public morality can be developed. An individual can be truly moral only when they are their own master. From the moment when they awaken to a comprehension of that which is equitable and good it is for them to direct their own movements, to seek in their conscience reasons for their actions, and to perform them simply, without either fearing punishment or looking for reward. Nevertheless their will cannot fail to be strengthened when they see others, guided like themselves by their own volition, following the same line of conduct. Mutual example will soon constitute a collective code of ethics to which all may conform without effort; but the moment that orders, enforced by legal penalties, replace the personal impulses of the conscience, there is an end to morality. Hence the saying of the Apostle of the Gentiles, “the law makes sin.” Even more, it is sin itself, because, instead of appealing to humanity’s better part, to its bold initiative, it appeals to its worst — it rules by fear. It thus behooves every one to resist the laws that they have not made, and to defend their personal rights, which are also the rights of others. People often speak of the antagonism between rights and duties. It is an empty phrase; there is no such antagonism. Whoso vindicates their own rights fulfills at the same time their duty towards their fellows. Privilege, not right, is the converse of duty.

Besides the possession of an individual’s own person, sound morality involves yet another condition — mutual goodwill, which is likewise the outcome of equality. The time-honored words of Mahabarata are as true as ever: “The ignorant are not the friends of the wise; the man who has no cart is not the friend of him who has a cart. Friendship is the daughter of equality; it is never born of inequality.” Without doubt it is given to some people, great by their thoughts, by sympathy, or by strength of will, to win the multitude; but if the attachment of their followers and admirers comes otherwise than an enthusiastic affinity of idea to idea, or of heart to heart, it is speedily transformed either into fanaticism or servility. Those who are hailed lord by the acclamations of the crowd must almost of necessity attribute to themselves exceptional virtues, or a “Grace of God,” that makes them in their own estimation as a predestined being, and they usurp without hesitation or remorse privileges which they transmit as a heritage of their children. But, while in rank exalted, they are morally degraded, and their partisans and sycophants are more degraded still: they wait for the words of command which fall from the master’s lips; when they hear in the depths of their conscience some faint note of dissent, it is stifled; they become practiced liars, they stoop to flattery, and lose the power of looking honest individuals in the face. Between those who command and those who obey, and whose degradation deepens from generation to generation, there is no possibility of friendship. The virtues are transformed; brotherly frankness is destroyed; independence becomes a crime; above is either pitying condescension or haughty contempt, below either envious admiration or hidden hate. Let each of us recall the past and ask ourselves in all sincerity the question: “Who are the individuals in whose society we have experienced the most pleasure?” Are they the personages who have “honored” us with their conversation, or the humble with whom we have “deigned” to associate? Are they

not rather our equals, those whose looks neither implore nor command, and whom we may love with open hearts without afterthought or reserve.

It is to live in conditions of equality and escape from the falsehoods and hypocrisies of a society of superiors and inferiors, that so many men and women have formed themselves into close corporations and little worlds apart. America abounds in communities of this sort. But these societies, few of which prosper while many perish, are all ruled more or less by force; they carry within themselves the seed of their own dissolution, and are reabsorbed by Nature's law of gravitation into the world which they have left. Yet even were they perfection, if humans enjoyed in them the highest happiness of which their nature is capable, they would be none the less obnoxious to the charge of selfish isolation, of raising a wall between themselves and the rest of their race; their pleasures are egotistical, and devotion to the cause of humanity would draw back the best of them into the great struggle.

As for the Anarchists, never will we separate ourselves from the world to build a little church, hidden in some vast wilderness. Here is the fighting ground, and we remain in the ranks, ready to give our help wherever it may be most needed. We do not cherish premature hopes, but we know that our efforts will not be lost. Many of the ignorant, who either out of love of routine or simplicity of soul now anathematize us, will end by associating themselves with our cause. For every individual whom circumstances permit to join us freely, hundreds are hindered by the hard necessities of life from openly avowing our opinions, but they listen from afar and cherish our words in the treasury of their hearts. We know that we are defending the cause of the poor, the disinherited, the suffering; we are seeking to restore to them the earth, personal rights, confidence in the future; and is it not natural that they should encourage us by look and gesture, even when they dare not come to us? In times of trouble, when the iron hand of might loosens its hold, and paralyzed rulers reel under the weight of their own power; when the "groups," freed for an instant from the pressure above, reform themselves according to their natural affinities, on which side will be the many? Though making no pretension to prophetic insight, may we not venture without temerity to say that the great multitude would join our ranks? Albeit they never weary of repeating that Anarchism is merely the dream of a few visionaries, do not even our enemies, by the insults they heap upon us and the projects and machinations they impute to us, make an incessant propaganda in our favor? It is said that, when the magicians of the Middle Ages wanted to raise the devil, they began their incantations by painting his image on a wall. For a long time past, modern exorcists have adopted a similar method for conjuring Anarchists.

Pending the great work of the coming time, and to the end that this work may be accomplished, it behooves us to utilize every opportunity for rede and deed. Meanwhile, although our object is to live without government and without law, we are obliged in many things to submit. On the other hand, how often are we enabled to disregard their behest and act on our own free will? Ours be it to let slip none of these occasions, and to accept tranquility whatever personal consequences may result from doing that which we believe to be our duty. In no case will we strengthen authority by appeals or petitions, neither shall we sanction the law by demanding justice from the courts nor, by giving our votes and influence to any candidate whatsoever, become the authors of our own ill-fortune? It is easy for us to accept nothing from power, to call no one "master," neither to be called "master" ourselves, to remain in the ranks as simple citizens and to maintain resolutely, and in every circumstance, our quality of equal among citizens. Let our friends judge us by our deeds, and reject from among them those of us who falter.

There are unquestionably many kind-hearted individuals that, as yet, hold themselves aloof from us, and even view our efforts with a certain apprehension, who would nevertheless gladly lend us their help were they not repelled by fear of the violence which almost invariably accompanies revolution. And yet a close study of the present state of things would show them that the supposed period of tranquility in which we live is really an age of cruelty and violence. Not to speak of war and its crimes, from the guilt of which no civilized State is free, can it be denied that chief among the consequences of the existing social system are murder, maladies, and death. Accustomed order is maintained by rude deeds and brute force, yet things that happen every day and every hour pass unperceived; we see in them a series of ordinary events no more phenomenal than times and seasons. It seems less than impious to rebel against the cycle of violence and repression which comes to us hallowed by the sanction of ages. Far from desiring to replace an era of happiness and peace by an age of disorder and warfare, our sole aim is to put an end to the endless series of calamities which has hitherto been called by common consent "The Progress of Civilization." On the other hand, vengeance is the inevitable incident of a period of violent changes. It is the nature of things that they should be. Albeit deeds of violence, prompted by a spirit of hatred, bespeak a feeble moral development, these deeds become fatal and necessary whenever the relations between people are not the relations of perfect equity. The original form of justice as understood by primitive peoples was that of retaliation, and by thousands of rude tribes this system is still observed. Nothing seemed more just than to offset one wrong by a like wrong. Eye for an eye! Tooth for a tooth! If the blood of one person has been shed, another must die! This was the barbarous form of justice. In our civilized societies it is forbidden to individuals to take the law into their own hands. Governments, in their quality of social delegates, are charged on behalf of the community with the enforcement of justice, a sort of retaliation somewhat more enlightened than that of the savage. It is on this condition that the individual renounces the right of personal vengeance; but if they be deceived by the mandates to whom they entrust the vindication of their rights, if they perceive that their agents betray their cause and league themselves with the oppressors, that official justice aggravates their wrongs; in a word, if whole classes and populations are unfairly used, and have no hope of finding in the society to which they belong a redresser of abuses, is it not certain that they will resume their inherent right of vengeance and execute it without pity? Is not this indeed an ordinance of Nature, a consequence of the physical law of shock and counter-shock? It were unphilosophic to be surprised by its existence. Oppression has always been answered by violence.

Nevertheless, if great human evolutions are always followed by sad outbreaks of personal hatreds, it is not to these bad passions that well-wishers of their kind appeal when they wish to rouse the motive virtues of enthusiasm, devotion, and generosity. If changes had no other result than to punish oppressors, to make them suffer in their turn, to repay evil with evil, the transformation would be only in seeming. What boots it to those who truly love humanity and desire the happiness of all that the slave becomes master, that the master is reduced to servitude, that the whip changes hands, and that money passes from one pocket to another? It is not the rich and the powerful whom we devote to destruction, but the institutions which have favored the birth and growth of these malevolent beings. It is the medium which it behooves us to alter, and for this great work we must reserve all our strength; to waste it in personal vindications were merest puerility. "Vengeance is the pleasure of the gods," said the ancients; but it is not the pleasure of self-respecting mortals; for they know that to become their own avengers would be to lower themselves to the level of their former oppressors. If we would rise superior to our

adversary, we must, after vanquishing them, make them bless their defeat. The revolutionary device, "For our liberty and for yours," must not be an empty word.

The people in all times have felt this; and after every temporary triumph the generosity of the victor has obliterated the menaces of the past. It is a constant fact that in all serious popular movements, made for an idea, hope of a better time, and above all, the sense of a new dignity, fills the soul with high and magnanimous sentiments. So soon as the police, both political and civil, cease their functions and the masses become masters of the streets, the moral atmosphere changes, each feels themselves responsible for the prosperity and contentment of all; molestation of individuals is almost unheard of; even professional criminals pause in their sad career, for they too, feel that something great is passing through the air. Ah! if revolutionaries, instead of obeying a vague idea as they have almost always done, had formed a definite aim, a well-considered scheme of social conduct, if they had firmly willed the establishment of a new order of things in which every citizen might be assured bread, work, instruction, and the free development of their being, there would have been no danger in opening all prison gates to their full width, and saying to the unfortunates whom they shut in, "Go, brothers and sisters, and sin no more."

It is always to the nobler part of humanity that we should address ourselves when we want to do great deeds. A general fighting for a bad cause stimulates their soldiers with promises of booty; a benevolent individual who cherishes a noble object encourages their companions by the example of their own devotion and self-sacrifice. For them, faith in their idea is enough. As says the proverb of the Danish peasants: "His will is his paradise." What matters is that he is treated like a visionary! Even though his undertakings were only a chimera, he knows nothing more beautiful and sweet than the desire to act rightly and do good; in comparison with this vulgar realities are for him but shadows, the apparitions of an instant.

But our ideal is not a chimera. This, public opinion well knows; for no question more preoccupies it than that of social transformation. Events are casting their shadows before. Among individuals who think is there one who in some fashion or another is not a socialist — that is to say, who has not their own little scheme for changes in economic relations? Even the orator who noisily denies that there is a social question affirms the contrary by a thousand propositions. And those who will lead us back to the Middle Ages, are they not also socialists? They think they have found in a past, restored after modern ideas, conditions of social justice which will establish for ever the brotherhood of man. All are awaiting the birth of a new order of things; all ask themselves, some with misgiving, others with hope, what the morrow will bring forth. It will not come with empty hands. The century which has witnessed so many grand discoveries in the world of science cannot pass away without giving us still greater conquests. Industrial appliances, that by a single electric impulse make the same thought vibrate through five continents, have distanced by far our social morals, which are yet in many regards the outcome of reciprocally hostile interests. The axis is displaced; the world must crack that its equilibrium may be restored. In spirit revolution is ready; it is already thought — it is already willed; it only remains to realize it, and this is not the most difficult part of the work. The Governments of Europe will soon have reached the limits to the expansion of their power and find themselves face to face with their increasing populations. The super-abundant activity which wastes itself in distant wars must then find employment at home — unless in their folly the shepherds of the people should try to exhaust their energies by setting the Europeans against Europeans, as they have done before. It is true that in this way they may retard the solution of the social problem, but it will rise again after each postponement, more formidable than before.

Let economists and rulers invent political constitutions or salaried organizations, whereby the worker may be the friend of their master, the subject the brother of the potentate, we, “frightful Anarchists” as we are, know only one way of establishing peace and goodwill among women and men — the suppression of privilege and the recognition of right. Our ideal, as we have said, is that of the fraternal equity for which all yearn, but almost always as a dream; with us it takes form and becomes a concrete reality. It pleases us not to live if the enjoyments of life are to be for us alone; we protest against our good fortune if we may not share it with others; it is sweeter for us to wander with the wretched and the outcasts than to sit, crowned with roses, at the banquets of the rich. We are weary of these inequalities which make us the enemies of each other; we would put an end to the furies which are ever bringing people into hostile collision, and all of which arise from the bondage of the weak to the strong under the form of slavery, serfage, and service. After so much hatred we long to love each other, and for this reason are we enemies of private property and despisers of the law.

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Elisée Reclus
An Anarchist on Anarchy
1884

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Anarchy

Elisée Reclus

1895

YOU know that we, the Anarchists, are considered as a set of most desperate and wicked men; and recently, perusing by mere chance an English review which had already published some of my scientific papers, I found, to my surprise, that I was spoken of by name as belonging to a “gang of ruffians.” Now, this is indeed a very bad introduction to you; still I hope you will not condemn me at once. If you have read and heard the attacks, you are bound by fair play to hear also the defense, and even a counter-attack.

Our name explains perfectly what our aim is — at least our negative aim. We wish to do away with government because every organization from the outside prevents the free working of spontaneous organization. Government, under all its various shapes, is but another name for a body of people having got the power to enforce their will, which they call and make *Law*; and this will, this Law, represents not the society’s interest, but their own. If mankind’s ideal is the happiness of all, government cannot and will not ever fulfil it, because its first concern is for its own members. Subjects come always after the ruler; and even were they sensuously pleased as a herd of well-fed swine, they will never enjoy that true happiness which exists between friends and equals. A drudging servant never enjoys life nobly and manfully side by side with his master, never a slave with a free man; never a poor fellow picking up in the mud his morsel of bread with the rich, who does not care for bread, because dainties are better for him.

Our ideal of society is quite different from the actual state of things, quite different from the imagined Utopias of most ancient and modern writers. High people, who have enjoyed the privileges of birth, wealth, and education are always prone to believe themselves to be a chosen tribe; and even when they feel kindly towards the lowborn poor, they want them to be led by strings, like children, and taught good morals by their betters. And who are their betters? The aristocracy, of course — those who enjoy already the advantages of a pleasant life, and who by their very position are induced to maintain inequality in their own favor.

The society we imagine, and whose evolution we are studying in the present chaotic crowd of conflicting units, is a society in which work is going on, not by the behest of a whole hierarchy of chiefs and sub-chiefs, but by the comprehension of common interests and the natural working of mutual aid and sympathy; in which order is kept, not by the strong arm of law, by prisons, cat-o’-nine-tails, hanging-ropes, guillotines, and wholesale blowings-up, but by universal education, by respect of everyone for himself and for others; in which happiness will be ensured, not by

intermittent and disdainful charities, but by real and substantial welfare, and by the common enjoyment of riches due to the common work.

In fact, the change we propose in society is precisely the change which is going on in the family itself, where the old idea of a ruling master, having the right, and even the duty, to chastise with the rod wife and children, is gradually abandoned, and where love, mutual respect, and permanent kindness are considered the only natural ties between all. And everywhere the same evolution is going on in social morals. People feel that a new departure must be taken in the methods of social activity. Even in workshops and great manufactories, the best way of going on smoothly for employers and employed is to have, in spite of the difference in wages, a link of mutual respect. You all remember the saying of the chief engineer of the Forth Bridge at the opening of that most stupendous work of the age: "If all we fellow-workers had not labored together in the glorious undertaking with the same mind and the same heart, it never would have been achieved. Every nail is necessary to the whole; everyone of us has been necessary to this splendid end!" Such were the words of the illustrious constructor; he felt that enthusiasm for the achievement of a great work had been throughout the chief motor, although, generally and quite naturally, hatred and envy are bred by the difference of social standing and salaries. That enthusiasm for high aims is to take the place of continual compulsion.

Of course, we know that the change in society brought about by the substitution of inner natural organization for the outer artificial organization of caprice, force, and law, will be a change of capital importance, and, in consequence, accompanied by numerous and formidable events. Every general evolution brings in its wake corresponding revolutions. It must be so, and we cannot alter the course of history; but this we know, that howsoever great may be the dangers following the change from governance to spontaneous grouping, these dangers can never compare with the actual evils which result from the exercise of personal authority and the extortions of law...

There is a proverbial phrase which is very commonly uttered, even by the most conservative people: "The best government is that which governs the least!" This is also our opinion, and we follow it logically by adding that government, when reduced to a mere cypher, leaves society free to attain its final perfection. But everywhere, the so-called "civilized" nations groan under the pressure of a more or less strong government, and certainly I can show you in no part of the world any large community which lives entirely free, without the intervention of people who consider themselves as rulers, givers of work and superintendents of the whole political and social machinery.

All Anarchical existing groups (and there are many of them) are only small tribes, enjoying their entire freedom from general or local governments in forests and in open plains. There are, also, some groups of agriculturists who have still the good luck in mountain fastnesses to escape conquest, and the laws of monarchies or republics. We must add a few consciously Anarchical and Communist societies that have arisen during this century in Western Europe and America. I must especially mention the old Icarians, who began some fifty years ago as authoritarians and law-abiders, who had a chief or rather a pope, but who, by a long series of vicissitudes lost, so to say, their first skin and, changing their constitution from time to time, finished by abolishing it altogether, and now live happily and simply without any other rule of life than self and mutual respect and love.

But if I can show you only comparatively small Anarchical communities, history exemplifies to us in a splendid way how among nations progress is always in exact proportion to the increase of freedom, to the decrease of strength in government and power in laws.

Look first at Greece, the land to which we trace our spiritual birth. Certainly it had governments, even many of them, aristocracies and democracies and oligarchies and so on, but with the single exception of barbarous Sparta, entirely composed of warriors, who were forbidden to think, to speak, even to read, all the Greek republics were in a state of constant evolution and revolution; governments built on the sand were continually shaken; they had no time to take hold of the public mind, to become a kind of religion, correlative with the belief in a heavenly god, and the strife of thought went on between parties and parties, between men and men. The spirit of freedom was not crushed among them as it had been in Babylon, in Persia, in Egypt, and that is why knowledge increased immensely in all directions. Art attained a perfect beauty which was considered for two thousand years as a definite standard; all sciences began or developed themselves, and the outlines of every course of study which we are now trying to complete were distinctly marked; history made its appearance in literary master-pieces; the theories of evolution, which most people falsely think a new conquest, grow splendidly in Epicurus out of the treasury of facts; and, lastly, morals progressed at the same pace as science, as is shown by the admirable, and I say eternal, books of the Stoics, so well sustained by their noble life. That period of time is always the pride and glory of mankind.

And now let us turn to another period, when the long night of the middle-ages gave way to the first light of the dawn. For more than one thousand years triumphant barbarian chiefs and Christian monks had utterly prevented any freedom of speech and thought; but under those ashes gleamed still some fire, and flames rose again. The history of communes, that history which has not yet been written, but which, I hope, will be taken up by some of our thinkers, began in all parts of Europe and even of Mussulman Africa. There was everywhere, as in ancient Greece, a clashing of states against states, of barons against cities, of peasantry against knights: innumerable conflicts and revolutions shook the old state of things, and people were born to new thoughts. Again that happy struggle, which weakened the idea of strong government, allowed human intellect to free itself and a new period of science, literature, art, discovery, morals, developed itself throughout Europe. Some of the most splendid pages that have been written belong to that time, which culminates with the Renaissance, that is with the new birth of mankind, when old Greece was discovered again.

The names of the Spanish comuneros, of the French communes, of the English yeomen, of the free cities in Germany, of the Republic of Novgorod and of the marvelous communities of Italy must be, with us Anarchists, household words: never was civilized humanity nearer to real Anarchy than it was in certain phases of the communal history of Florence and Nürnberg.

Great monarchies prevailed over these many free republics and the gloom of subjection seemed to darken our Western Europe; but it was difficult to eradicate entirely free speech and free thought. In spite of the great kings, in spite of Philip of Spain and Louis XIV of France, the little common wealth of Netherlands had writers and printers to keep tyranny in check. Afterwards the struggle went on also in France, in England, in America, minds emancipated themselves and gave rise to those revolutions, which were the beginning of our modern world. Without those revolutions society would have been at a stand-still in industry, in science, art, social philosophy; and we Anarchists, instead of speaking to you on the destruction of capitalist society, would have certainly no opportunity of grouping ourselves all over the world in new communities.

And now do you not think it is too late for government to put a gag in our mouth, to let silence reign again over a subject people? We have behind us the impulse of all former acquisitions in science and in morals and these drive us forward with an irresistible force.

Certainly, we seem to be weak in numbers, in material strength, and we are very poor in money; meanwhile governments have on their side armies, ammunition, millions and millions of pounds, the reasonings of the political economists and the blessing of the priests. But there is one thing which is wanting to them and which we have. This will be the reason for our final and decided victory. They know already that they are wrong; they don't believe in their own morals. We, on the contrary, know that we are right and that our idea is just; for we are working and fighting for the equality of men, for the happiness of all human beings.

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Elisée Reclus
Anarchy
1895

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Art and the People

Elisée Reclus

1904, 1927

At the closing of the Salon, one of my friends, an amateur connoisseur of beautiful things, came to me quite desolate. He had been ill and had taken a journey away from Paris. Now he returned too late for the Exhibition and so he lamented not having been able to see these multitudes of marbles and paintings which special reviews kept him conversant with.

The dear comrade may reassure himself. A walk upon forest-paths, on fallen leaves, or one moment of repose upon the brink of a pure fountain-if he can find one still fifteen or twenty leagues from the boulevard-will console him for having missed his visit to the habitual museum where there is shut up every year temporarily that which is called the "belles arts".

Certainly I do not want to decry the fine arts. In my childhood I have always admired the wonders of the fairs, the beautiful rope-dancers, the jugglers around whom whirled plates, the tricksters who broke watches and changed them into bouquets of flowers. At the Salon I continue to admire in all naivete like a very ninny. There also do I see the artist prestidigitators who manipulate and mix colours with an incomparable dexterity, who blend in a thousand ways lights and shadows in a hash which is entirely unexpected and who succeed in making a stunning light spring up from the darkest depths. All this seems to be very fine, or rather surprising, and I applaud the virtuosi of the pencil in all sincerity.

Nevertheless, I am not at all satisfied. Is it this indeed which is true art? Do I find therein the consolation of sorrows, the respites from the weariness of daily life and profound woes which accompany us for all our lives ? Can all these paintings, sculptures, engraved or embroidered objects make me forget the sordid misery outside and the presence of the armed policeman who, yonder, near the door, or in the room itself, can crash his weapon upon a peaceful citizen and fracture his skull? No, all this multi-coloured art that accumulates its incongruous products in rooms lent by the State can only be a false and lying art, for it is not the work of a free people.

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Elisée Reclus
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Culture and Property

Elisée Reclus

1905

There is not a single European country in which the traditions of the old communal property have entirely disappeared. In certain areas, notably in the Ardennes and in the steep mountainous regions of Switzerland, where the peasants did not have to submit to the kind of oppression to which the German villagers were subjected after the wars of the Reformation, communal property is still widespread enough to constitute a considerable part of the territory.

In the Belgian Ardennes, the collective lands are composed of three parts: the woods, the freshly cleared ground [*sart*], and the pastures. They also often include arable land and quarries. The woods, which form the largest part of the property, are divided into a certain number of sections, generally twenty to twenty-two. Each year, one section is divided by drawing lots among the various households of the commune, the bark of the oaks having been previously stripped for the benefit of the communal coffers. For the work with heavy wood, the families divide into groups of five, whose members rotate the responsibility of cutting down the trees, squaring the timber, and transporting it. After the cutting, each person proceeds to clear the portion of the land that fell to his lot and sows the rye that he will harvest the following year. Two and a half years after harvesting the rye, the inhabitants apportion the broom plants that have grown in the clearings, after which the section, in which new growth has already begun, is left to itself until the same operations recommence. The grazing is communal and without any special organization, and takes place on the uncultivated lands, in the mature woods, and in the brush six or seven years after a cutting. Stones may be quarried freely, barring any previous notice to the contrary.

These customs clearly influence the moral character of individuals and greatly develop their spirit of solidarity, mutual kindness, and heartfelt friendliness. Thus it is customary to form voluntary work crews for the benefit of those who need work done. The latter need only to state their request by proceeding noisily through the village, calling out, "So-and-so needs something done! Who wants to help out?" Immediately a group appears and its members put their heads together to figure out who can best undertake the job, and the service is rendered.¹ Such stories also come to us from the Queyras.²

In all of Switzerland, two-thirds of the alpine prairies and forests belong to the communes, which also own peat bogs, reed marshes, and quarries, as well as fields, orchards, and vineyards.

¹ Paul Gille, *Société nouvelle*, March 1988. [Reclus' note]

² Briot, *Etudes sur l'économie alpestre*. [Reclus' note]

On many occasions when the co-proprietors of the commune have to work together, they feel as though they are at a festival rather than at work. The young men and women climb to the high mountain pastures, driving their herds before them to the harmonious clinking of the bells. At other times, the work is more difficult. While the snow still covers the ground, the woodsmen, armed with axes, cut the high pines in the communal forest. They strip the sawlogs and slide them down the avalanche corridors to the torrent that will carry them away in its bends and rapids.

Then there are the evening gatherings on winter nights, in which all are summoned to the home of whoever has the most urgent work, whether it is to shell corn, hull nuts, or make wedding gifts for a woman engaged to be married. During these gatherings, the work is a pleasure. The children want to participate, for everything is new to them. Instead of going to bed, they stay up with the adults and are given the best of the chestnuts roasting under the hot embers. When dreamtime is near, they listen to songs and are told stories, adventures, and fables, which are transformed by their imaginations into marvelous apparitions. It is often during such nights of mutual good will that a child's being permanently takes shape. Here, one's loves in life are kindled, and life's bitterness is made sweeter.

Thus the spirit of full association has by no means disappeared in the communes, despite all the ill will of the rich and the state, who have every interest in breaking apart these tightly bound bundles of resistance to their greed or power and who attempt to reduce society to a collection of isolated individuals. Traditional mutual aid occurs even among people of different languages and nations. In Switzerland, it is customary to exchange children from family to family, between the German and the French cantons. Similarly, the country people of Béarn send their children to the Basque country, welcoming in turn young Basques as farm boys. In this way, they will all soon learn the two languages without the parents having to spend any money. Finally, all individuals with a similar trade and common interests—whether they be coal merchants, hunters, or sailors—have established virtual confraternities having neither written constitutions nor signatures, but nevertheless forming small, close-knit republics. Throughout the world, carnival performers who meet by chance on the road are allied in a sort of freemasonry that is far more solemn than that of the “brothers” who gather in the temples of Hiram.³

It is evident that anyone who becomes master over his fellow man through war, conquest, usury, or any other means thereby establishes private property for his own advantage. For by appropriating the man, he also takes possession of another's labor and of the product of that labor, and finally of that portion of the common soil on which his slave produces crops. No matter how tenaciously the people may have sought to maintain their ancient traditions, the power of kings has inevitably led these rulers to indulge their caprice. They take men and land, and dispense all according to their whims. The forms of gratitude, the homage of vassals, and the circumstances of tenure have varied according to the country and the age, but the essential fact is that ownership of the land was no longer secured for those who worked it but was instead granted to one who was incapable of handling a spade or driving a plow.

Just as common property and private property conflict, there is a constantly raging battle between large and small property. Not only does each create class groupings hostile to one another,

³ Hiram was king of Tyre and a contemporary of David and Solomon. According to tradition, Hiram was “Grand Master of all Masons,” and participated in the construction of Solomon's Temple. For this reason, he has been an important figure in the legendary history of Freemasonry.

but they also collide as two different and enemy systems. Although each arises from the appetites and passions of man, the two forms of property are presented by their advocates as systems that should be maintained permanently because of their essential virtues. First of all, small ownership, which seems closer to natural equity, is vaunted as the ideal state. It offers to the farming family a life of constant work and regular employment to fill its hours and days. Even when the fields are fallow, the members of the household must tend to the livestock and prepare their produce. They also decorate their homes, and in this way art plays a normal role in the life of the peasant. Novelists delight in the rustic cottage, which becomes the charming setting for the idyll of their dreams. But though the dream has been realized many times, it is much more likely that a wretched poverty will inhabit the hearth. And even if a humble family is lucky enough to enjoy modest comfort, what can they do to enlarge their horizons, to expand their ideas, to renew their intellectual resources, or even to increase their knowledge of their own industry? The routine that binds them to the hereditary soil also holds them tightly in the grip of the customs of the past. However free they may appear to be, they nevertheless possess the souls of slaves.

The owners of vast landholdings claim to be educators in the science of agriculture in order to justify the usurpation of communal and private lands due to their birth, hereditary wealth, or speculations. This claim is particularly inappropriate in the case of those powerful lords who are careful to live somewhere other than on their own lands, like most of the nobility of Irish estates, who are well aware of the hatred their tenant farmers feel for them. Is it not, then, simply ludicrous to speak of them as “educators” of any sort? And what about those who might otherwise be warmly received by serfs reconciled to the condition of non-ownership, but who, concerned only with receiving their income, hand over the entire burden of management to stewards, trustees, or lawyers, for whom the management of the estate is also far from being a selfless duty?

It is true that in certain countries renowned agronomists owning large estates have instituted excellent methods of cultivating the soil, managed their fields as scientifically as the chemical industries that utilize the most up-to-date processes, introduced new species of plants and animals, and adopted practices that were previously unknown. One must not forget, however, that the *latifundium*⁴ in its essence inevitably requires that the vast majority be deprived of land. If a few have much, it is because the majority no longer have any. Some large owners are seized with a hunger for land and also desire to be admired as local benefactors. But the devouring of the surrounding land by the large estates is hardly less disastrous than fire and other devastations. Moreover, it produces the same end result, which is the ruin not only of populations but also frequently of the land itself. Intelligent large landholders can no doubt train excellent farm hands, and they will certainly have domestics of impeccable correctness. But even assuming that the productive industry initiated by them provides more than enough labor for the entire local population, is it not inevitable that their authoritarian and absolutist manner of regimenting labor will create subjects rather than produce dignified equals? They make every effort to preserve the essentially monarchical character of society. Moreover, they try to return to the past by destroying all democratic elements in their milieu in order to reconstitute a feudal world where power belongs to those they deem to be the most deserving—that is to say, to themselves. And whether or not they are the most deserving, they remain the most privileged. One need only study a map of France to verify the influence exerted by large estates. Among the reasons that certain cantons automatically fall into the hands of reactionary representatives and masters, who are both

⁴ Large estate.

clericalist and militarist, none is more crucial than the influence of the large landowners. They have no need to tell their flunkies and farm hands how to vote, for they easily lead them so far down the path of moral degradation that they willingly vote in favor of a regime of obedience to the traditional master. The same spirit determines the voting of lackeys and tradesmen in the elegant neighborhoods of the cities and in the resorts.

Furthermore, is it not possible that if all its effects are considered, large ownership actually produces less material improvement than does small property, as divided up as the latter may be? If, taking the economy of France as a whole, one were to make a detailed comparison of the net profit produced by large estates under individual management and the losses to the communes resulting from the parks reserved for the privileged few, the hunting grounds, and the moors that displace small property, it is quite possible that, on balance, the losses would be greater. We would discover that large land ownership is for modern peoples what it was for ancient ones—a fatal plague. Furthermore, initiative has emerged not only among rich agronomists but also—though with less ostentation and acclaim—in small holdings among truck farmers, horticulturalists, and small farmers. The poor person is certainly a slave to routine and risks his few pennies, eaten away by taxes and usury, only with extreme prudence. But risk them he does. Some know how to observe, experiment, and learn, so that over many generations and centuries they carry out experiments of long-lasting value. The case is clear: the land of the austere peasant today yields twice as much as it did when Young traveled through the provinces of France and noted its disheartening poverty.⁵ Only through private initiative can there be progress, but the union of forces that enjoys all the advantages of large and small ownership has hardly begun to appear. There are only signs of its coming.

In considering the consequences of large property ownership, we must not forget the obstacles that it places in the way of free movement when the surrounding populations do not know how to bypass restrictions. In Great Britain, the “right of way” issue excites local opinion in twenty different places at any given time. The inhabitants find themselves cut off from the old roads, one after the other. Pity the communities that appeal to a court of law if they lack indisputable titles! In many districts in Scotland, landlords have forbidden by law all access to the mountains, and pedestrians are reduced to using the same roadway at the bottom of the valley as do bicycles and automobiles. The maps of the Ordnance Survey even caution that “the existence of a road on a map does not imply the right to use it.” And woe to the traveler who takes it upon himself to enter the underbrush or to pass through a fallow field! The last tollgates are now disappearing—as recently as 1893, 600,000 francs were paid for the removal of a turnpike that prevented livestock from having free access to Gower Street in London (the equivalent of Rue Bergère in Paris); however, numerous new prohibitive barriers have replaced these old tollgates. The usual excuse given by the landowners for closing the roads that cross their estate is the preservation of game, so poaching becomes an inevitable corollary of large landholdings. There is a stark contrast between the hunting trophies on which the legally authorized hunter prides himself and the slaughter committed by his nocturnal counterpart as well as the fishing by dynamite, which depopulates a river in a few hours. Moreover, the legal consequences are far from the same for these two sorts of hunters. Manhunting is permitted in practice to the property owner and his guards. On the other hand, one cannot begin to estimate how many during the

⁵ Arthur Young, an English agronomist, traveled through France on the eve of the French Revolution.

nineteenth century have spent years in prison or at hard labor, or have even gone to the scaffold, as a result of hunting the rabbit and the “sacred bird.”

Statesmen and economists are often interested in encouraging small property ownership. In Denmark, notably, every opportunity is offered for the easy acquisition of property of less than four hectares. Another example that comes to mind is the homestead exemption found in the United States, in which a small area of land per family as well as the house that the family occupies are declared non-transferable and unseizable, with conditions that vary somewhat from state to state. But it is obvious that such a system must remain limited to a small segment of the population. Otherwise, if each producer had access to the soil, his independence would be assured, and the current conception of society would be shaken to its very foundation. Also, one can be sure that nothing like this will ever become law in France, unless restrictions are imposed to make the effects illusory. Among European peoples, the Icelanders are alone in taking precautions against the monopolization of land. Since 1884, the property owner who does not cultivate the land himself has been obliged to rent it to another.

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Elisée Reclus
Culture and Property
1905

Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus.

Some of Reclus' most extensive comments on historical forms of property are found in "Culture and Property," which is in volume 6 of *L'Homme et la Terre* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905–8), 225–311. There he discusses the differences between large and small property holdings, individual and communal property, and cooperative and competitive practices. The following selections are taken from that chapter (268–71, 280–85). The text includes some of Reclus' most eloquent encomiums to cooperation and stinging criticisms of concentrated economic power.

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Evolution and Revolution

Elisée Reclus

1891

These two words, Evolution and Revolution, closely resemble one another, and yet they are constantly used in their social and political sense as though their meaning were absolutely antagonistic. The word Evolution, synonymous with gradual and continuous development in morals and ideas, is brought forward in certain circles as though it were the antithesis of that fearful word, Revolution, which implies changes more or less sudden in their action, and entailing some sort of catastrophe. And yet is it possible that a transformation can take place in ideas without bringing about some abrupt displacements in the equilibrium of life? Must not revolution necessarily follow evolution, as action follows the desire to act? They are fundamentally one and the same thing, differing only according to the time of their appearance. If, on the one hand, we believe in the normal progress of ideas, and, on the other, expect opposition, then, of necessity, we believe in external shocks which change the form of society.

It is this which I am about to try to explain, not availing myself of abstract terms, but appealing to the observation and experience of every one, and employing only such arguments as are in common use. No doubt I am one of persons known as “dreadful revolutionists;” for long years I have belonged to the legally infamous society which calls itself “The International Working Mens’ Association,” whose very name entails upon all who assume membership the treatment of malefactors; finally, I am amongst those who served that “execrable” Commune, “the detestation of all respectable men.” But however ferocious I may be, I shall know how to place myself outside, or rather above my party, and to study the present evolution and approaching revolution of the human race without passion or personal bias. As we are amongst those whom the world attacks, we have a right to demand to be amongst those whom it hears.

To begin with, we must clearly establish the fact, that if the word evolution is willingly accepted by the very persons who look upon revolutionists with horror, it is because they do not fully realise what the term implies, for they would not have the thing at any price. They speak well of progress in general, but they resent progress in any particular direction. They consider that existing society, bad as it is, and as they themselves acknowledge it to be, is worth preserving; it is enough for them that it realises their own ideal of wealth, power or comfort. As there are rich and poor, rulers and subjects, masters and servants, Caesars to command the combat, and gladiators to go forth and die, prudent men have only to place themselves on the side of the rich and powerful, and to pay court to Caesar. Our beautiful society affords them bread, money, place, and honour; what have they to complain of? They persuade themselves without any difficulty

that every one is as well satisfied as they. In the eyes of a man who has just dined all the world is well fed. Toying with his tooth-pick, he contemplates placidly the miseries of the "vile multitude" of slaves. All is well; perdition to the starveling whose moan disturbs his digestion! If society has from his cradle provided for the wants and whims of the egotist, he can at all events hope to win a place there by intrigue and flattery, by hard work, or the favour of destiny. What does moral evolution matter to him? To evolve a fortune is his one ambition!

But if the word evolution serves but to conceal a lie in the mouths of those who most willingly pronounce it, it is a reality for revolutionists; it is they who are the true evolutionists.

Escaping from all formulas, which to them have lost their meaning, they seek for truth outside the teaching of the schools; they criticise all that rulers call order, all that teachers call morality; they grow, they develop, they live, and seek to communicate their life. What they have learned they proclaim; what they know they desire to practise. The existing state of things seems to them iniquitous, and they wish to modify it in accordance with a new ideal of justice. It does not suffice them to have freed their own minds, they wish to emancipate those of others also, to liberate society from all servitude. Logical in their evolution, they desire what their mind has conceived, and act upon their desire.

Some years ago the official and courtly world of Europe was much in the habit of repeating that Socialism had quite died out. A man who was extremely capable in little matters and incapable in great ones, an absurdly vain *parvenu*, who hated the people because he had risen from amongst them, officially boasted that he had given Socialism its death-blow. He believed that he had exterminated it in Paris, buried it in the graves of Pere La Chaise. It is in New Caledonia at the Antipodes, thought he, that the miserable remnant of what was once the Socialist party is to be found. All his worthy friends in Europe hastened to repeat the words of Monsieur Thiers, and everywhere they were a song of triumph. As for the German Socialists, have we not the Master of Masters to keep an eye upon them, the man at whose frown Europe trembles? And the Russian Nihilists! Who and what are those wretches? Strange monsters, savages sprung from Huns and Bashkirs, about whom the men of the civilised West have no need to concern themselves!

Nevertheless the joy caused by the disappearance of Socialism was of short duration. I do not know what unpleasant consciousness first revealed to the Conservatives that some Socialists remained, and that they were not so dead as the sinister old man had pretended. But now no one can have any doubts as to their resurrection. Do not French workmen at every meeting pronounce unanimously in favour of that appropriation of the land and factories, which is already regarded as the point of departure for the the new economic era? Is not England ringing with the cry, "Nationalisation of the Land," and do not the great landowners expect expropriation at the hands of the people? Do not political parties seek to court Irish votes by promises of the confiscation of the soil, by pledging themselves beforehand to an outrage upon the thrice sacred rights of property? And in the United States have we not seen the workers masters for a week of all the railways of Indiana, and of part of those on the Atlantic sea-board? If they had understood the situation, might not a great revolution have been accomplished almost without a blow? And do not men, who are acquainted with Russia, know that the peasants, one and all, claim the soil, the whole of the soil, and wish to expel their lords? Thus the evolution is taking place. Socialism, or in other words, the army of individuals who desire to change social conditions, has resumed its march. The moving mass is pressing on, and now no government dare ignore its serried ranks. On the contrary, the powers that be exaggerate its numbers, and attempt to contend with it by absurd legislation and irritating interference. Fear is an evil counsellor.

No doubt it may sometimes happen that all is perfectly quiet. On the morrow of a massacre few men dare put themselves in the way of the bullets. When a word, a gesture are punished with imprisonment, the men who have courage to expose themselves to the danger are few and far between. Those are rare who quietly accept the part of victim in a cause, the triumph of which is as yet distant and even doubtful. Everyone is not so heroic as the Russian Nihilists, who compose manifestos in the very lair of their foes, and paste them on a wall between two sentries. One should be very devoted oneself to find fault with those who do not declare themselves Socialists, when their work, that is to say the life of those dear to them, depends on the avowal. But if all the oppressed have not the temperament of heroes, they feel their sufferings none the less, and large numbers amongst them are taking their own interests into serious consideration. In many a town where there is not one organised Socialist group, all the workers without exception are already more or less consciously Socialists; instinctively they applaud a comrade who speaks to them of a social state in which all the products of labour shall be in the hands of the labourer. This instinct contains the germ of the future Revolution; for from day to day it becomes more precise, transformed into distincter consciousness. What the worker vaguely felt yesterday, he knows today, and each new experience teaches him to know it better. And are not the peasants, who cannot raise enough to keep body and soul together from their morsel of ground, and the yet more numerous class who do not possess a clod of their own, are not all these beginning to comprehend that the soil ought to belong to the men who cultivate it? They have always instinctively felt this, now they know it, and are preparing to assert their claim in plain language.

This is the state of things; what will be the issue? Will not the evolution which is taking place in the minds of the workers, i.e. of the great masses, necessarily bring about a revolution; unless, indeed, the defenders of privilege yield with a good grace to the pressure from below? But history teaches us that they will do nothing of the sort. At first sight it would appear so natural that a good understanding should be established amongst men without a struggle. There is room for us all on the broad bosom of the earth; it is rich enough to enable us all to live in comfort. It can yield sufficient harvests to provide all with food; it produces enough fibrous plants to supply all with clothing; it contains enough stone and clay for all to have houses. There is a place for each of the brethren at the banquet of life. Such is the simple economic fact.

What does it matter? say some. The rich will squander at their pleasure as much of this earth as suits them; the middle-men, speculators and brokers of every description will manipulate the rest; the armies will destroy a great deal, and the mass of the people will have all the scraps that remain. "The poor we shall have always with us," say the contented, quoting a remark which, according to them, fell from the lips of a God. We do not care whether their God wished some to be miserable or not. We will re-create the world on a different pattern! "No, there shall be no more poor! As all men need to be housed and clothed and warmed and fed, let all have what is necessary, and none be cold or hungry!" The terrible Socialists have no need of a God to inspire these words; they are human, that is enough.

Thus two opposing societies exist amongst men. They are intermingled, variously allied here and there by the people who do not know their own minds, and advance only to retreat; but viewed from above, and taking no account of uncertain and indifferent individuals who are swayed hither and thither by fate like waves of the sea, it is certain that the actual world is divided into two camps, those who desire to maintain poverty, i.e. hunger for others, and those who demand comforts for all. The forces in these two camps seem at first sight very unequal. The supporters of existing society have boundless estates, incomes counted by hundreds of thou-

sands, all the powers of the State, with its armies of officials, soldiers, policemen, magistrates, and a whole arsenal of laws and ordinances. And what can the Socialists, the artificers of the new society, oppose to all this organised force? Does it seem that they can do nothing? Without money or troops they would indeed succumb if they did not represent the evolution of ideas and of morality. They are nothing, but they have the progress of human thought on their side. They are borne along on the stream of the times.

The external form of society must alter in correspondence with the impelling force within; there is no better established historical fact. The sap makes the tree and gives it leaves and flowers; the blood makes the man; the ideas make the society. And yet there is not a conservative who does not lament that ideas and morality, and all that goes to make up the deeper life of man, have been modified since "the good old times." Is it not a necessary result of the inner working of men's minds that social forms must change and a proportionate revolution take place?

Let each ascertain from his own recollections the changes in the methods of thought and action which have happened since the middle of this century. Let us take, for example, the one capital fact of the diminution of observance and respect. Go amongst great personages: what have they to complain of? That they are treated like other men. They no longer take precedence; people neglect to salute them; less distinguished persons permit themselves to possess handsomer furniture or finer horses; the wives of less wealthy men go more sumptuously attired. And what is the complaint of the ordinary man or woman of the middle-class? There are no more servants to be had, the spirit of obedience is lost. Now the maid pretends to understand cooking better than her mistress; she does not piously remain in one situation, only too grateful for the hospitality accorded her; she changes her place in consequence of the smallest disagreeable observation, or to gain two shillings more wages. There are even countries where she asks her mistress for a character in exchange for her own.

It is true, respect is departing; not the just respect which attaches to an upright and devoted man, but that despicable and shameful respect which follows wealth and office; that slavish respect which gathers a crowd of loafers when a king passes, and makes the lackeys and horses of a great man objects of admiration. And not only is respect departing, but those who lay most claim to the consideration of the rest, are the first to compromise their superhuman character. In former days Asiatic sovereigns understood the art of causing themselves to be adored. Their palaces were seen from afar; their statues were erected everywhere; their edicts were read; but they never showed themselves. The most familiar never addressed them but upon their knees; from time to time a half-lifted veil parted to disclose them as if by a lightning flash, and then as suddenly enfolded them once more, leaving consternation in the hearts of all beholders. In those days respect was profound enough to result in stupifaction: a dumb messenger brought a silken cord to the condemned, and that sufficed, even a gesture would have been superfluous. And now we see sovereigns taking boxes by telegraph at the theatre to witness the performance of *Orphee aux Enfers* or *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*, that is to say, taking part in the derision of all which used to be held most worthy of respect- divinity and royalty! Which is the true regicide, the man who kills a sovereign, doing him the honour to take him as the representative of a whole society, or the monarch, who mocks at himself by laughing at the Grand Duchess or General Boum ? He teaches us at least that political power is a worm eaten institution. It has retained its form, but the universal respect which gave it worth has disappeared. It is nothing but an external scaffolding, the edifice itself has ceased to exist.

Does not the spread of an education, which gives the same conception of things to all, contribute to our progress towards equality? If instruction were only to be obtained at school, governments might still hope to hold the minds of men enslaved; but it is outside the school that most knowledge is gained. It is picked up in the street, in the workshop, before the booths of a fair, at the theatre, in railway carriages, on steam boats, by gazing at new landscapes, by visiting foreign towns. Almost every one travels now, either as a luxury or a necessity. Not a meeting but people who have seen Russia, Australia, or America may be found in it, and if travellers who have changed continents are so frequently met with, there is, one may say, no one who has not moved about sufficiently to have observed the contrast between town and country, mountain and plain, earth and sea. The rich travel more than the poor, it is true; but they generally travel aimlessly; when they change countries they do not change surroundings, they are always in a sense at home; the luxuries and enjoyments of hotel life do not permit them to appreciate the essential differences between country and country, people and people. The poor man, who comes into collision with the difficulties of life without guide or *cicerone*, is best qualified to observe and remember. And does not the great school of the outer world exhibit the prodigies of human industry equally to rich and poor, to those who have called these marvels into existence and those who profit by them? The poverty-stricken outcast can see railways, telegraphs, hydraulic rams, perforators, self-lighting matches, as well as the man of power, and he is no less impressed by them. Privilege has disappeared in the enjoyment of some of these grand conquests of science. When he is conducting his locomotive through space, doubling or slackening speed at his pleasure, does the engine-driver believe himself the inferior of the sovereign shut up behind him in a gilded railway-carriage, and trembling with the knowledge that his life depends on a jet of steam, the shifting of a lever, or a bomb of dynamite?

The sight of nature and the works of man, and practical life, these form the college in which the true education of contemporary society is obtained. Schools, properly so called, are relatively much less important; yet they, too, have undergone their evolution in the direction of equality. There was a time, and that not very far distant, when the whole of education consisted in mere formulas, mystic phrases, and texts from sacred books. Go into the Mussel school opened beside the mosque. There you will see children spending whole hours in spelling or reciting verses from the Koran. Go into a school kept by Christian priests, Protestant or Catholic, and you will hear silly hymns and absurd recitations. But even in these schools the pressure from below has caused this dull routine to be varied with a new sort of instruction; instead of nothing but formulas the teachers now explain facts, point out analogies and trace the action of laws. Whatever the commentaries with which the instructor accompanies his lessons, the figures remain none the less incorruptible. Which education will prevail? That according to which two and two make four, and nothing is created out of nothing; or the odd education according to which everything comes from nothing and three persons make only one?

The elementary school, it is true, is not all: it is not enough to catch a glimpse of science, one should be able to apply it in every direction. Therefore Socialistic evolution renders it necessary that school should be a permanent institution for all men. After receiving "general enlightenment" in a primary school, each ought to be able to develop to the full such intellectual capacity as he may possess, in a life which he has freely chosen. Meanwhile let not the worker despair. Every great conquest of science ends by becoming public property. Professional scientists are obliged to go through long ages of research and hypothesis, they are obliged to struggle in the midst of error and falsehood; but when the truth is gained at length, often in spite of them, thanks to

some despised revolutionists, it shines forth clear and simple in all its brilliance. All understand it without an effort: it seems as if it had always been known. Formerly learned men fancied that the sky was a round dome, a metal roof — or better still — a series of vaults, three, seven, nine, even thirteen, each with its procession of stars, its distinct laws, its special *regime* and its troops of angels and archangels to guard it! But since these tiers of heavens, piled one upon the other, mentioned in the Bible and Talmud, have been demolished, there is not a child who does not know that round the earth is infinite and unconfined space. He hardly can be said to learn this. It is a truth which henceforward forms a part of the universal inheritance.

It is the same with all great acquisitions, especially in morals and political economy. There was a time when the great majority of men were born and lived as slaves, and had no other ideal than a change of servitude. It never entered their heads that “one man is as good as another.” Now they have learnt it, and understand that the virtual equality bestowed by evolution must be changed into real equality, thanks to a revolution. Instructed by life, the workers comprehend certain economic laws much better than even professional economists. Is there a single workman who remains indifferent to the question of progressive or proportional taxation, and who does not know that all taxes fall on the poorest in the long run? Is there a single workman who does not know the terrible fatality of the “iron law,” which condemns him to receive nothing but a miserable pittance, just the wage: that will prevent his dying of hunger during his work? Bitter experience has caused him to know quite enough of this inevitable law of political economy.

Thus, whatever be the source of information, all profit by it, and the worker not less than the rest. Whether a discovery is made by a bourgeois, a noble, or a plebeian, whether the learned man is Bernard Palissy, Lord Bacon, or Baron Humboldt, the whole world will turn his researches to account. Certainly the privileged classes would have liked to retain the benefits of science for themselves, and leave ignorance to the people, but henceforth their selfish desire cannot be fulfilled. They find themselves in the case of the magician in “The Thousand and One Nights,” who unsealed a vase in which a genius had been shut up asleep for ten thousand years. They would like to drive him back into his retreat, to fasten him down under a triple seal, but they have lost the words of the charm, and the genius is free for ever.

This freedom of the human will is now asserting itself in every direction; it is preparing no small and partial revolutions, but one universal Revolution. It is throughout society as a whole, and every branch of its activity, that changes are making ready. Conservatives are not in the least mistaken when they speak in general terms of Revolutionists as enemies of religion, the family and property. Yes; Socialists do reject the authority of dogma and the intervention of the supernatural in nature, and, in this sense however earnest their striving for the realisation of their ideal, they are the enemies of religion. Yes; they do desire the suppression of the marriage market; they desire that unions should be free, depending only on mutual affection and respect for self and for the dignity of others, and, in this sense, however loving and devoted to those whose lives are associated with theirs, they are certainly the enemies of the legal family. Yes; they do desire to put an end to the monopoly of land and capital, and to restore them to all, and, in this sense, however glad they may be to secure to every one the enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, they are the enemies of property.

Thus the current of evolution, the incoming tide, is bearing us onward towards a future radically different from existing conditions, and it is vain to attempt to oppose obstacles to destiny. Religion, by far the most solid of all dikes, has lost its strength: cracking on every side, it leaks and totters, and cannot fail to be sooner or later overthrown.

It is certain that contemporary evolution is taking place wholly outside Christianity. There was a time when the word Christian, like Catholic, had a universal signification, and was actually applied to a world of brethren, sharing, to a certain extent, the same customs, the same ideas, and a civilisation of the same nature. But are not the pretensions of Christianity to be considered in our day as synonymous with civilisation, absolutely unjustifiable? And when it is said of England or Russia that their armies are about to carry Christianity and civilisation into distant regions, is not the irony of the expression obvious to every one? The garment of Christianity does not cover all the peoples who by right of culture and industry form a part of contemporary civilisation. The Parsees of Bombay, the Brahmins of Benares eagerly welcome our science, but they are coldly polite to the Christian Missionaries. The Japanese, though so prompt in imitating us, take care not to accept our religion. As for the Chinese, they are much too cunning and wary to allow themselves to be converted. "We have no need of your priests," says an English poem written by a Chinese, "We have no need of your priests. We have too many ourselves, both long-haired and shaven. What we need is your arms and your science, to fight you and expel you from our land, as the wind drives forth the withered leaves!"

Thus Christianity does not nominally cover half the civilised world, and even where it is supposed to be paramount, it must be sought out; it is much more a form than a reality, and amongst those who are apparently the most zealous, it is nothing but an ignoble hypocrisy. Putting aside all whose Christianity consists merely in the sprinkling of baptism or inscription on the parish register, how many individuals are there whose daily life corresponds with the dogmas they profess, and whose ideas are always, as they should be, those of another world? Christians rendered honourable by their perfect sincerity may be sought without marked success even in "Protestant Rome," a city, nevertheless, of mighty traditions. At Geneva as at Oxford, as at all religious centres, and everywhere else, the principal preoccupations are non-ecclesiastical; they lean towards politics, or, more often still, towards business. The principal representatives of so-called Christian society are Jews, "the epoch's kings." And amongst those who devote their lives to higher pursuits — science, art, poetry — how many, unless forced to do so, occupy themselves with theology? Enter the University of Geneva. At all the courses of lectures — medicine, natural history, mathematics, even jurisprudence — you will find voluntary listeners; at every tone except at those upon theology. The Christian religion is like a snow-wreath melting in the sun: traces are visible here and there, but beneath the streaks of dirty white the earth shows, already clear of rime.

The religion which is thus becoming detached, like a garment, from European civilisation, was extremely convenient for the explanation of misery, injustice, and social inequality. It had one solution for everything-miracles. A Supreme will had pre-ordained all things. Injustice was an apparent evil, but it was preparing good tilings to come. "God giveth sustenance to the young birds. He prepareth eternal blessedness for the afflicted. Their misery below is but the harbinger of felicity on high!" These things were ceaselessly repeated to the oppressed as long as they believed them; but now such arguments have lost all credence, and are no longer met with, except in the petty literature of religious tracts.

What is to be done to replace the departing religion? As the worker believes no longer ill miracles, can he perhaps be induced to believe in lies? And so learned economists, academicians, merchants, and financiers have contrived to introduce into science the bold proposition that property and prosperity are always the reward of labour! It would be scarcely decent to discuss such an assertion. When they pretend that labour is the origin of fortune, economists know

perfectly well that they are not speaking the truth. They know as well as the Socialists that wealth is not the product of personal labour, but of the labour of others: they are not ignorant that the runs of luck on the Exchange and the speculations which create great fortunes have no more connection with labour than the exploits of brigands in the forests; they dare not pretend that the individual who has five thousand pounds a day, just what is required to support one hundred thousand persons like himself, is distinguished from other men by an intelligence one hundred thousand times above the average. It would be scandalous to discuss this sham origin of social inequality. It would be to be a dupe, almost an accomplice, to waste time over such hypocritical reasoning.

But arguments of another kind are brought forward, which have at least the merit of not being based upon a lie. The right of the strongest is now evoked against social claims. Darwin's theory, which has lately made its appearance in the scientific world, is believed to tell against us. And it is, in fact, the right of the strongest which triumphs when fortune is monopolised. He who is materially the fittest, the most wily, the most favoured by birth, education, and friends; he who is best armed and confronted by the feeblest foe, has the greatest chance of success; he is able better than the rest to erect a citadel, from the summit of which he may look down on his unfortunate brethren. Thus is determined the rude struggle of conflicting egoisms. Formerly this blood-and-fire theory was not openly avowed; it would have appeared too violent, and honied words were preferable. But the discoveries of science relative to the struggle between species for existence and the survival of the fittest, have permitted the advocates of force to withdraw from their mode of expression all that seemed too insolent. "See, they say, "it is an inevitable law! Thus decrees the fate of mankind!"

We ought to congratulate ourselves that the question is thus simplified, for it is so much the nearer to its solution. Force reigns, say the advocates of social inequality! Yes, it is force which reigns! proclaims modern industry louder and louder in its brutal perfection. But may not the speech of economists and traders be taken up by revolutionists? The law of the strongest will not always and necessarily operate for the benefit of commerce. "Might surpasses right," said Bismark, quoting from many others; but it is possible to make ready for the day when might will be at the service of right. If it is true that ideas of solidarity are spreading; if it is true that the conquests of science end by penetrating the lowest strata; if it is true that truth is becoming common property; if evolution towards justice *is* taking place, will not the workers, who have at once the right and the might, make use of both to bring about a revolution for the benefit of all? What can isolated individuals, however strong in money, intelligence, and cunning, do against associated masses?

In no modern revolution have the privileged classes been known to fight their own battles. They always depend on armies of the poor, whom they have taught what is called loyalty to the flag, and trained to what is called "the maintenance of order." Five millions of men, without counting the superior and inferior police, are employed in Europe in this work. But these armies may become disorganised, they may call to mind the nearness of their own past and future relations with the mass of the people, and the hand which guides them may grow unsteady. Being in great part drawn from the proletariat, they may become to *bourgeois* society what the barbarians in the pay of the Empire became to that of Rome — an element of dissolution. History abounds in examples of the frenzy which seizes upon those in power. When the miserable and disinherited of the earth shall unite in their own interest, trade with trade, nation with nation, race with race; when they shall fully awake to their sufferings and their purpose, doubt not that an occasion will

assuredly present itself for the employment of their might in the service of right; and powerful as may be the Master of those days, he will be weak before the starving masses leagued against him. To the great evolution now taking place will succeed the long expected, the great revolution.

It will be salvation, and there is none other. For if capital retains force on its side, we shall all be the slaves of its machinery, mere bands connecting iron cogs with steel and iron shafts. If new spoils, managed by partners only responsible to their cash books, are ceaselessly added to the savings already amassed in bankers' coffers, then it will be vain to cry for pity, no one will hear your complaints. The tiger may renounce his victim, but bankers' books pronounce judgments without appeal. From the terrible mechanism whose merciless work is recorded in the figures on its silent pages, men and nations come forth ground to powder. If capital carries the day, it will be time to weep for our golden age; in that hour we may look behind us and see like a dying light, love and joy and hope — all the earth has held of sweet and good. Humanity will have ceased to live.

As for us, whom men call "the modern barbarians," our desire is justice for all. Villains that we are, we claim for all that shall be born, bread, liberty, and progress.

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Elisée Reclus
Evolution and Revolution
1891

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On Vegetarianism

Elisée Reclus

1901

Men of such high standing in hygiene and biology having made a profound study of questions relating to normal food, I shall take good care not to display my incompetence by expressing an opinion as to animal and vegetable nourishment. Let the cobbler stick to his last. As I am neither chemist nor doctor, I shall not mention either azote or albumen, nor reproduce the formulas of analysts, but shall content myself simply with giving my own personal impressions, which, at all events, coincide with those of many vegetarians. I shall move within the circle of my own experiences, stopping here and there to set down some observation suggested by the petty incidents of life.

First of all I should say that the search for truth had nothing to do with the early impressions which made me a potential vegetarian while still a small boy wearing baby-frocks. I have a distinct remembrance of horror at the sight of blood. One of the family had sent me, plate in hand, to the village butcher, with the injunction to bring back some gory fragment or other. In all innocence I set out cheerfully to do as I was bid, and entered the yard where the slaughtermen were. I still remember this gloomy yard where terrifying men went to and fro with great knives, which they wiped on blood-besprinkled smocks. Hanging from a porch an enormous carcase seemed to me to occupy an extraordinary amount of space; from its white flesh a reddish liquid was trickling into the gutters. Trembling and silent I stood in this blood-stained yard incapable of going forward and too much terrified to run away. I do not know what happened to me; it has passed from my memory. I seem to have heard that I fainted, and that the kind-hearted butcher carried me into his own house; I did not weigh more than one of those lambs he slaughtered every morning.

Other pictures cast their shadows over my childish years, and, like that glimpse of the slaughter-house, mark so many epochs in my life. I can see the sow belonging to some peasants, amateur butchers, and therefore all the more cruel. I remember one of them bleeding the animal slowly, so that the blood fell drop by drop; for, in order to make really good black puddings, it appears essential that the victim should have suffered proportionately. She cried without ceasing, now and then uttering groans and sounds of despair almost human; it seemed like listening to a child.

And in fact the domesticated pig is for a year or so a child of the house; pampered that he may grow fat, and returning a sincere affection for all the care lavished on him, which has but one aim — so many inches of bacon. But when the affection is reciprocated by the good woman

who takes care of the pig, fondling him and speaking in terms of endearment to him, is she not considered ridiculous — as if it were absurd, even degrading, to love an animal that loves us?

One of the strongest impressions of my childhood is that of having witnessed one of those rural dramas, the forcible killing of a pig by a party of villagers in revolt against a dear old woman who would not consent to the murder of her fat friend. The village crowd burst into the pigstye and dragged the beast to the slaughter place where all the apparatus for the deed stood waiting, whilst the unhappy dame sank down upon a stool weeping quiet tears. I stood beside her and saw those tears without knowing whether I should sympathise with her grief, or think with the crowd that the killing of the pig was just, legitimate, decreed by common sense as well as by destiny.

Each of us, especially those who have lived in a provincial spot, far away from vulgar ordinary towns, where everything is methodically classed and disguised — each of us has seen something of these barbarous acts committed by flesh-eaters against the beasts they eat. There is no need to go into some Porcopolis of North America, or into a saladero of La Plata, to contemplate the horrors of the massacres which constitute the primary condition of our daily food. But these impressions wear off in time; they yield before the baneful influence of daily education, which tends to drive the individual towards mediocrity, and takes out of him anything that goes to the making of an original personality. Parents, teachers, official or friendly, doctors, not to speak of the powerful individual whom we call “everybody,” all work together to harden the character of the child with respect to this “four-footed food,” which, nevertheless, loves as we do, feels as we do, and, under our influence, progresses or retrogresses as we do.

It is just one of the sorriest results of our flesh-eating habits that the animals sacrificed to man’s appetite have been systematically and methodically made hideous, shapeless, and debased in intelligence and moral worth. The name even of the animal into which the boar has been transformed is used as the grossest of insults; the mass of flesh we see wallowing in noisome pools is so loathsome to look at that we agree to avoid all similarity of name between the beast and the dishes we make out of it. What a difference there is between the moufflon’s appearance and habits as he skips about upon the mountain rocks, and that of the sheep which has lost all individual initiative and becomes mere debased flesh — so timid that it dares not leave the flock, running headlong into the jaws of the dog that pursues it. A similar degradation has befallen the ox, whom now-a-days we see moving with difficulty in the pastures, transformed by stock-breeders into an enormous ambulating mass of geometrical forms, as if designed beforehand for the knife of the butcher. And it is to the production of such monstrosities we apply the term “breeding”! This is how man fulfils his mission as educator with respect to his brethren, the animals.

For the matter of that, do we not act in like manner towards all Nature? Turn loose a pack of engineers into a charming valley, in the midst of fields and trees, or on the banks of some beautiful river, and you will soon see what they would do. They would do everything in their power to put their own work in evidence, and to mask Nature under their heaps of broken stones and coal. All of them would be proud, at least, to see their locomotives streaking the sky with a network of dirty yellow or black smoke. Sometimes these engineers even take it upon themselves to improve Nature. Thus, when the Belgian artists protested recently to the Minister of Railroads against his desecration of the most beautiful parts of the Meuse by blowing up the picturesque rocks along its banks, the Minister hastened to assure them that henceforth they should have nothing to complain about, as he would pledge himself to build all the new workshops with Gothic turrets!

In a similar spirit the butchers display before the eyes of the public, even in the most frequented streets, disjointed carcasses, gory lumps of meat, and think to conciliate our æstheticism by boldly decorating the flesh they hang out with garlands of roses!

When reading the papers, one wonders if all the atrocities of the war in China are not a bad dream instead of a lamentable reality. How can it be that men having had the happiness of being caressed by their mother, and taught in school the words “justice” and “kindness,” how can it be that these wild beasts with human faces take pleasure in tying Chinese together by their garments and their pigtaails before throwing them into a river? How is it that they kill off the wounded, and make the prisoners dig their own graves before shooting them? And who are these frightful assassins? They are men like ourselves, who study and read as we do, who have brothers, friends, a wife or a sweetheart; sooner or later we run the chance of meeting them, of taking them by the hand without seeing any traces of blood there.

But is there not some direct relation of cause and effect between the food of these executioners, who call themselves “agents of civilisation,” and their ferocious deeds? They, too, are in the habit of praising the bleeding flesh as a generator of health, strength, and intelligence. They, too, enter without repugnance the slaughter house, where the pavement is red and slippery, and where one breathes the sickly sweet odour of blood. Is there then so much difference between the dead body of a bullock and that of a man? The dissevered limbs, the entrails mingling one with the other, are very much alike : the slaughter of the first makes easy the murder of the second, especially when a leader’s order rings out, or from afar comes the word of the crowned master, “Be pitiless.”

A French proverb says that “every bad case can be defended.” This saying had a certain amount of truth in it so long as the soldiers of each nation committed their barbarities separately, for the atrocities attributed to them could afterwards be put down to jealousy and national hatred. But in China, now, the Russians, French, English, and Germans have not the modesty to attempt to screen each other. Eyewitnesses, and even the authors themselves, have sent us information in every language, some cynically, and others with reserve. The truth is no longer denied, but a new morality has been created to explain it. This morality says there are two laws for mankind, one applies to the yellow races and the other is the privilege of the white. To assassinate or torture the first named is, it seems, henceforth permissible, whilst it is wrong to do so to the second.

Is not our morality, as applied to animals, equally elastic? Harking on dogs to tear a fox to pieces teaches a gentleman how to make his men pursue the fugitive Chinese. The two kinds of hunt belong to one and the same “sport”; only, when the victim is a man, the excitement and pleasure are probably all the keener. Need we ask the opinion of him who recently invoked the name of Attila, quoting this monster as a model for his soldiers?

It is not a digression to mention the horrors of war in connection with the massacre of cattle and carnivorous banquets. The diet of individuals corresponds closely to their manners. Blood demands blood. On this point any one who searches among his recollections of the people whom he has known will find there can be no possible doubt as to the contrast which exists between vegetarians and coarse eaters of flesh, greedy drinkers of blood, in amenity of manner, gentleness of disposition and regularity of life.

It is true these are qualities not highly esteemed by those “superior persons,” who, without being in any way better than other mortals, are always more arrogant, and imagine they add to their own importance by depreciating the humble and exalting the strong. According to them, mildness signifies feebleness : the sick are only in the way, and it would be a charity to get rid of them. If they are not killed, they should at least be allowed to die. But it is just these

delicate people who resist disease better than the robust. Full-blooded and high-coloured men are not always those who live longest : the really strong are not necessarily those who carry their strength on the surface, in a ruddy complexion, distended muscle, or a sleek and oily stoutness. Statistics could give us positive information on this point, and would have done so already, but for the numerous interested persons who devote so much time to grouping, in battle array, figures, whether true or false, to defend their respective theories.

But, however this may be, we say simply that, for the great majority of vegetarians, the question is not whether their biceps and triceps are more solid than those of the flesh-eaters, nor whether their organism is better able to resist the risks of life and the chances of death, which is even more important : for them the important point is the recognition of the bond of affection and goodwill that links man to the so-called lower animals, and the extension to these our brothers of the sentiment which has already put a stop to cannibalism among men. The reasons which might be pleaded by anthropophagists against the disuse of human flesh in their customary diet would be as well-founded as those urged by ordinary flesh-eaters today. The arguments that were opposed to that monstrous habit are precisely those we vegetarians employ now. The horse and the cow, the rabbit and the cat, the deer and the hare, the pheasant and the lark, please us better as friends than as meat. We wish to preserve them either as respected fellow-workers, or simply as companions in the joy of life and friendship.

“But,” you will say, “if you abstain from the flesh of animals, other flesh-eaters, men or beasts, will eat them instead of you, or else hunger and the elements will combine to destroy them.” Without doubt the balance of the species will be maintained, as formerly, in conformity with the chances of life and the inter-struggle of appetites; but at least in the conflict of the races the profession of destroyer shall not be ours. We will so deal with the part of the earth which belongs to us as to make it as pleasant as possible, not only for ourselves, but also for the beasts of our household. We shall take up seriously the educational rôle which has been claimed by man since prehistoric times. Our share of responsibility in the transformation of the existing order of things does not extend beyond ourselves and our immediate neighbourhood. If we do but little, this little will at least be our work.

One thing is certain, that if we held the chimerical idea of pushing the practice of our theory to its ultimate and logical consequences, without caring for considerations of another kind, we should fall into simple absurdity. In this respect the principle of vegetarianism does not differ from any other principle; it must be suited to the ordinary conditions of life. It is clear that we have no intention of subordinating all our practices and actions, of every hour and every minute, to a respect for the life of the infinitely little; we shall not let ourselves die of hunger and thirst, like some Buddhist, when the microscope has shown us a drop of water swarming with animalculæ. We shall not hesitate now and then to cut ourselves a stick in the forest, or to pick a flower in a garden; we shall even go so far as to take a lettuce, or cut cabbages and asparagus for our food, although we fully recognise the life in the plant as well as in animals. But it is not for us to found a new religion, and to hamper ourselves with a sectarian dogma; it is a question of making our existence as beautiful as possible, and in harmony, so far as in us lies, with the æsthetic conditions of our surroundings.

Just as our ancestors, becoming disgusted with eating their fellow-creatures, one fine day left off serving them up to their tables; just as now, among flesh-eaters, there are many who refuse to eat the flesh of man’s noble companion, the horse, or of our fireside pets, the dog and cat — so is it distasteful to us to drink the blood and chew the muscle of the ox, whose labour helps to

grow our corn. We no longer want to hear the bleating of sheep, the bellowing of bullocks, the groans and piercing shrieks of the pigs, as they are led to the slaughter. We aspire to the time when we shall not have to walk swiftly to shorten that hideous minute of passing the haunts of butchery with their rivulets of blood and rows of sharp hooks, whereon carcasses are hung up by blood-stained men, armed with horrible knives. We want some day to live in a city where we shall no longer see butchers' shops full of dead bodies side by side with drapers' or jewellers', and facing a druggist's, or hard by a window filled with choice fruits, or with beautiful books, engravings or statuettes, and works of art. We want an environment pleasant to the eye and in harmony with beauty.

And since physiologists, or better still, since our own experience tells us that these ugly joints of meat are not a form of nutrition necessary for our existence, we put aside all these hideous foods which our ancestors found agreeable, and the majority of our contemporaries still enjoy. We hope before long that flesh-eaters will at least have the politeness to hide their food. Slaughter houses are relegated to distant suburbs; let the butchers' shops be placed there too, where, like stables, they shall be concealed in obscure corners.

It is on account of the ugliness of it that we also abhor vivisection and all dangerous experiments, except when they are practised by the man of science on his own person. It is the ugliness of the deed which fills us with disgust when we see a naturalist pinning live butterflies into his box, or destroying an ant-hill in order to count the ants. We turn with dislike from the engineer who robs Nature of her beauty by imprisoning a cascade in conduit-pipes, and from the Californian woodsman who cuts down a tree, four thousand years old and three hundred feet high, to show its rings at fairs and exhibitions. Ugliness in persons, in deeds, in life, in surrounding Nature — this is our worst foe. Let us become beautiful ourselves, and let our life be beautiful!

What then are the foods which seem to correspond better with our ideal of beauty both in their nature and in their needful methods of preparation? They are precisely those which from all time have been appreciated by men of simple life; the foods which can do best without the lying artifices of the kitchen. They are eggs, grains, fruits; that is to say, the products of animal and vegetable life which represent in their organisms both the temporary arrest of vitality and the concentration of the elements necessary to the formation of new lives. The egg of the animal, the seed of the plant, the fruits of the tree, are the end of an organism which is no more, and the beginning of an organism which does not yet exist. Man gets them for his food without killing the being that provides them, since they are formed at the point of contact between two generations. Do not our men of science who study organic chemistry tell us, too, that the egg of the animal or plant is the best storehouse of every vital element? *Omne vivum ex ovo.*

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Elisée Reclus
On Vegetarianism
1901

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The Evolution of Cities

Elisée Reclus

1895

To look at our enormous cities, expanding day by day and almost hour by hour, engulfing year by year fresh colonies of immigrants, and running out their suckers, like giant octopuses, into the surrounding country, one feels a sort of shudder come over one, as if in presence of a symptom of some strange social malady. One could almost take up one's parable against these prodigious agglomerations of humanity and prophesy against them as Isaiah prophesied against Tyre, «full of wisdom and perfect in beauty», or against Babylon, «the son of the morning». Yet it is easy to show that this monster growth of the city, the complex outcome of a multiplicity of causes, is not altogether a morbid growth. If, on the one hand, it constitutes, in some of its incidents, a formidable fact for the moralist, it is, on the other hand, in its normal development, a sign of healthy and regular evolution. Where the cities increase, humanity is progressing; where they diminish, civilisation itself is in danger. It is therefore important to distinguish clearly the causes which have determined the origin and growth of cities, those which lead to their decay and disappearances, and those, again, which are now transforming them little by little, in the process of wedding them, so to speak, to the surrounding country.

Even in the earliest time, when the primitive tribes of men were still wandering in woods and savannahs, nascent society was endeavouring to produce the germs of the future town; already the shoots that were destined to expand into such mighty branches were beginning to show themselves around the outline of the stem. It is not among our civilised populations, but in the full heyday of primitive barbarism that we must watch the creative forces at work on the production of those centres of human life which were to be the precursors of the town and the metropolis.

To begin with, man is sociable. Nowhere do we find a people whose ideal of life is complete isolation. The craving for perfect solitude is an aberration possible only in an advance stage of civilisation, to fakirs and anchores distraught by religious delirium or broken by the sorrows of life; and even then they are still dependent on the society around them, which brings them day by day, in exchange for their prayers or benedictions, their daily bread. If they were really rapt in a perfect ecstasy, they would exhale their spirits on the spot; or if they were desperate indeed, they would slink away to die like the wounded animal that hides itself in the black shadows on the forest.

But the sane man of savage society —hunter, fisher, or shepherd— loves to find himself among his companions. His need may oblige him often to keep solitary watch for the game, to follow the shoal alone in a narrow skiff, beaten by the waves, to wander far from the encampment in

search of fresh pastures for his flocks; but as soon as he can rejoin his friends with a fair supply of provisions he hies back to the common camp, the nucleus of the city that is to be.

Except in countries where the population is extremely sparse and scattered over immense distances, it is usual for several tribes to have a common trysting-place, generally at some chosen spot easily accessible by natural roadways —rivers, defiles, or mountain passes. Here they have their feasts, their palavers, their exchange of the goods which some lack and others have to spare. The Redskins, who in the last century still overran the forest tracts and prairies of the Mississippi, preferred for their rendezvous some peninsula dominating the confluence of the rivers —such as the triangular strip of land that separates the Monongahela and the Allegheny; or bare hills commanding a wide and uninterrupted view, whence they could see their companions travelling over the distant prairie or rowing on the river or the lake —such as, for instance, the large island of Manitou, between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. In countries rich in game, fish, cattle, and cultivable land, the grouping becomes closer, other things being equal, in proportion to the abundance of the means of living. The sites of future towns are indicated already by the natural meeting-place common to the various centres of production. How many modern cities have sprung up in this way in places which have been a resort from all antiquity!

The traffic in commodities carried on at these trysting-places becomes an additional incentive, over and above the instinctive social need, to the formation of fresh nuclei among the primitive populations; and further, some nascent industry generally accompanies these beginnings of trade. A bed of flint for cutting and polishing weapons and other implements, a layer of pottery clay or pipe clay for vessels of calumets, a vein of metal which might be cast or hammered into trinkets, a heap of beautiful shells suitable for ornaments or money —all these are attractions which draw men together; and if at the same time this places are favourable situated as centres of food-supply, the combine all the requirements necessary for the formation of a town.

But man is not guided only by his interest in the conduct of his life. The fear of the unknown, the terror of mystery, tends also to fix a centre of population in the neighbourhood of places regarded with superstitious dread. The terror itself attracts. If vapours are seen ascending from fissures in the soil, as if from the furnace where the gods are forging their thunderbolts; if strange echoes are heard reverberating among the mountains like voices of mocking genii; if some block of iron falls from heaven, or some mysterious shape takes human form and stalks the air no sooner does such a phenomenon mark out some special spot, than religion consecrates it, temples rise above it, the faithful gather round, and we have the beginnings of a Mecca or a Jerusalem.

Human hatred, even, has had its share in the founding of cities; even in our own day it founds them still. It was one of the constant cares of ancestors to guard themselves from hostile incursions. There are vast regions in Asia and Africa where every village is surrounded by its breast-work and palisades; and even in our own Southern Europe every group of dwellings situated in the vicinity of the sea has its walls, its watch-tower, and its keep or fortified church, and on the least alarm the country-folk take shelter within its ramparts. All the advantages of the ground were utilised to make the place of habitation a place also of refuge. An islet afforded an admirable site for a maritime or lacustrine city, which might at once overlook its enemies, and receive its friends in the port cut off by its cluster of cabins from the open sea. Steep rocks, with perpendicular sides, from which blocks of stone could be rolled down upon the assailant, formed a sort of natural fortress which was much appreciated. Thus the Zuñi, the Moqui, and other cliff-dwellers poised themselves on their lofty terraces, and dominated space like eagles.

Primitive man, then, looked out the site; civilised man founded and built the city. At the earliest beginnings of written history, among the Chaldaeans and the Egyptians, on the borders of the Euphrates and the Nile, the city had long existed, and it appears by that time to have numbered its inhabitants by tens and hundreds of thousands. The cultivation of these river-valleys required an immense amount of organised labour, the draining of swamps, the deflecting of river-beds, the construction of embankments, the digging of canals for irrigation; and the completion of these works necessitated the building of cities in the immediate neighbourhood of the stream, on an artificial platform of beaten earth raised well above the level of inundation. It is true that in these far-distant times, sovereigns who had that lives of innumerable slaves at their disposal had already begun to choose the sites of their palaces at their own caprice; but personal as their power was, they could but carry on the normal movement initiated by the populations themselves. It was the country folk, after all, who gave birth to the cities which in later times have so often turned against their forgotten creators.

Never was the normal and spontaneous birth of cities more strikingly illustrated than in the Greek era, when Athens, Megara, Sicyon sprang up at the foot of their hills like flowers in the shade of the olives trees. The whole country —the fatherland of the citizen— was contained within a narrow space. From the heights of its acropolis he could follow with his eye the limits of the collective domain, now along the line of the sea-shore, traced by the white selvage of the waves, then across the distant blue of wooden hill, and past ravines and gorges to the crests of the shining rocks. The son of the soil could name every brooklet, every clump of trees, every little house in sight. He knew every family that sheltered under those thatched roof, every spot made memorable by the exploits of his national heroes, or by the fallen thunderbolts of his gods. The peasant, on their part, regarded the city as peculiarly their own. They knew the beaten paths that had grown to be its streets, the broad roads and squares that still bore the names of the trees that used to grow there; they could remember playing round the spring which now mirrored the statues of the nymphus. High on the summit of the protecting hill rose the temple of the sculptured deity whom they invoked in hours of public danger, and behind its ramparts they all took refuge when the enemy was in possession of the open country. Nowhere did any other soil beget a patriotism of such intensity, a life of each so bound up with the prosperity of all. The political organism was as simple, as sharply defined, as one and indivisible, as that of the individual himself.

Far more complex to begin with was the commercial city of the Middle Ages, which lived by its industries or its foreign trade, and which was often surrounded only by a little belt of gardens. It saw around it in disturbing proximity the fortresses of its feudal friends or adversaries, claspings the wretched hovels of the villagers between their feet, like eagles planting their talons in their prey. In this medieval society the antagonism between town and country sprang up as the result of foreign conquest; reduced to mere serfdom under the baron, the labourer —a fixture of the soil, in the insulting language of the law— was flung like a weapons against the towns, by no will of his own; whether as workman or as armed retainer, he was forced into opposition against the borough with its rising industrial class.

Of all European countries, Sicily is the one in which the pristine harmony between town and country has most nearly survived. The open country is uninhabited except by day, during the hours of field-labour. There are no villages. In the evening labourers and herdsman return to the city with their flocks; peasants in the daytime, they becomes citizens at night. There is no sweeter or more touching sight than that of the processions of toilers returning to the towns at

the moment when the sun sinks behind the mountains, casting up the vast shadow of the earth against the eastern horizon. The unequal groups follow each other at intervals up the ascending road—for, with the view to security, the towns are almost always perched on the summit of some cliff, where their white walls can be seen for ten leagues round. Families and friend join each other for the climb, and the children and the dogs run with joyous cries from group to group. The cattle pause from time to time to crop a bit of choice herbage by the roadside. The young girls sit astride on the beast, while the lads help them over the difficult places, and sing and laugh and sometimes whisper softly with them.

But it is not only in Sicily—the Sicily of Theocritus—that one meets these gracious evening groups. Round the whole on the Mediterranean coast, Asia Minor to Andalusia, the antique customs are partially retained, or at least have left their traces. All the little fortified towns that line the shores of Italy and Provence belong to the same type of miniature republic, the nightly resort of all the peasants of the agricultural outskirts.

If the earth were perfectly uniform in the shape of its relief and the qualities of its soil, the towns would occupy, so to speak, and almost geometrical position. Mutual attraction, the social instinct, the convenience of trade, would have caused them to spring up at pretty nearly equal distances. Given a flat plain without natural obstacles, without rivers or favourably situated ports, and with no political divisions carving the territory into distinct States, the chief city would have been planted full in the centre of the country; the large towns would have been distributed at equal distances round it, rhythmically spaced out among themselves, and each possessing its planetary system of smaller towns, the normal distance being the distance of a day's march—for, in the beginning, the step of man as the natural measure between place and place, and the number of miles that can be covered by an average walker between dawn and dusk was, under ordinary conditions, the regular stage between one town and the next. The domestication of animals, and, later, the invention of the wheel, modified these primitive measurements; the stride of the horse, and then the turn of the axle-tree, became the unit of calculation in reckoning the distance between the urban inhabited countries—in China, in the neighbourhood of the Ganges, in the plains of the Po, in Central Russia and even in France itself—one may discern beneath the apparent disorder a real order of distribution, which was evidently regulated long ago by the step on the traveller.

A little pamphlet in 1850, or thereabouts, by Gobert, an ingenious man and an inventor, living as a refugee in London, drew attention to the astonishing regularity of the distribution of the large towns in France before mining and other industrial operations came in to upset the natural balance of the population. Thus Paris is surrounded, towards the frontiers of the country, by a ring of great but subordinate cities—Lille, Boreaux, Lyons. The distance from Paris to the Mediterranean being about double the ordinary radius, another great city had to arise at the extremity of this line, and Marseilles, the old Phoenician and Greek colony, developed itself splendidly. Between Paris and these secondary centres arose, at fairly equal distances, a number of smaller, but still considerable cities, separates from each other by a double distance, say, of about eighty miles—Orleans, Tours, Poitiers, Angoulême. Finally, halfway between these tertiary centres, in a position suggestive of the average distance, there grew up the modest towns of Etampes, Amboise, Châtellerauld, Ruffec, Libourne. Thus the traveller, in his journey through France, would find, as it were, alternately a halting-place and a resting-place, the first adequate for the foot-passenger and the second convenient for the horseman and the coach. On almost all the high roads the

rhythm of cities follows the same plan —a sort of natural cadence regulating the progress of men, horses, and carriages.

The irregularities of this network of stations are all explicable by the features of the country, its ups and downs, the flow of its rivers, the thousand points of geographical variation. The nature of the soil, in the first place, influences men in their spontaneous choice of a site for their dwellings. Where the blade cannot grow the town cannot grow either. It turns away from the sterile heath, from the hard gravels and the heavy clays, and expands first in such of the more fertile districts as are easy of cultivation —for the soft alluvium of the marshes, fertile enough in its way, is not always easily accessible, and cannot be brought under culture without an organisation of labour which implies a very advanced stage of progress.

Again, the unevenness of the land, as well as the niggardliness of the soil, tends to repel population, and prevents, or at least retards, the growth of cities. The precipices, the glaciers, the snows, the bitter winds, thrust men out, so to speak, from the rugged mountain valleys; and the natural tendency of the towns is to cluster immediately outside the forbidden region, on the first favourable spot that presents itself at the entrance of the valleys. Every torrent has its riverside town in the lowland, just where its bed suddenly widens and it breaks into a multitude of branches among the gravels. In the same way every double, triple, or quadruple confluent of the valley has its important town, a town so much the more considerable, other things being equal, as the branches of the delta carry a greater abundance of water. Take, for instance, from this point of view the geography of the Pyrenees and of the Alps. Could any situation be more naturally indicated than that of Zaragoza, placed on the mid course of the Ebro, at the crossing of the double of the Gallego and the Huerva? The city of Toulouse, again, the metropolis of Southern France, stands on a spot which a child might have pointed out beforehand as a natural site, just where the river becomes navigable below the confluence of Upper Garonne, the Ariège and the Ers. At the opposite corners of Switzerland, Basle and Geneva stand at the great cross-roads followed by the ancient migrations of peoples; and on the southern slope of the Alps every valley without exception has its warden town at its gates. Great cities like Milan and so many others mark the chief points of convergence; and the whole upper valley of the Po, forming three-quarters of an immense circle, has for its natural centre the city of Turin.

But the rivers must not be regarded as simply the median artery of the valleys; they are essentially movement and life. Now life appeals to life; and man with his ever-wandering spirit, continually impelled towards the distant horizon, loves to linger beside the flowing stream which bears at once his vessels and his thoughts. Nevertheless, he will not settle indifferently on either side the stream, making no distinction between the outer and the inner curve, the rapid and the lazy current. He tries hither and thither before he finds the site that pleases him. He chooses by preference the points of convergence or ramification, where he can take advantage of the three or four navigable ways that offer themselves at starting, instead of two directions only, up stream and down stream. Or he plants himself at the necessary point of stoppage —rapids, waterfalls, rocky defiles, where vessels come to anchor and the merchandise is transhipped; or where the river narrows and it becomes easy to cross from side to side. Finally, in each river basin the vital point is found to be the head of the estuary, where the rising tide checks and bears up the downward current, and where the boats borne down by the fresh water meet the ocean vessels coming in with the tide. This place of meeting of the water, in the hydrographic system, may be likened to the position held by the stock of a tree between the system of serial vegetation above and that of the deep-spreading roots below.

The deviations of the coast-line also affect the distribution of towns. Straight sandy shore, almost unbroken, inaccessible to large vessels except on the rare days of dead calm, are avoided by the inhabitants of the interior as well as by the seafaring man. Thus, the 136 miles of coast which run in a straight line from the mouth of the Gironde to that of the Adour have no town at all except Arcachon, which is simply a small watering-place, set well back from the sea behind the dunes of the Cap Ferré. In the same way, the formidable series of littoral barriers that flanks the Carolinas along their Atlantic shore gives access, for the whole distance between Norfolk and Wilmington, only to a few petty towns carrying on with difficulty a dangerous traffic. In other sea-coast regions, islets and islets, rocks, promontories, peninsulas innumerable, the thousand jags and snippings of the cliffs, equally prevent the formation of towns in spite of all the advantages of deep and sheltered waters. The violence of a too tempestuous coast forbids the settlement of more than very small groups of persons. The most favourable situations are those which afford a temperate climate and a coast accessible both by land and sea, alike to ships and wheeled vehicles.

All the other features of the soil, physical, geographical, climatic, contribute in the same way to the birth and growth of cities. Every advantage augments their power of attraction; every disadvantage detracts from it. Given the same environment and the same stage of historical evolution, the size of the cities is measured exactly by the sum of their natural privileges. An African city and a European city, existing under similar natural condition, will be very different from one another, because their historical environment is so totally different; but there will, nevertheless, be a certain parallelism in their destinies. By a phenomenon analogous to that of the disturbance of planets, two neighbouring urban centres exercise a mutual influence on each other, and either promote each other's development by supplying complementary advantages—as in the case of Manchester, the manufacturing town, and Liverpool, the commercial town—or injure each other by competition where their advantages are of the same kind. Thus the town of Libourne, which stands of the Dordogne, only a little distance from Bordeaux, but just on the other side of the neck of land that separates the Dordogne from the Garonne, might have rendered the same services to trade and navigation that Bordeaux actually renders; but the neighbourhood of Bordeaux has been her ruin; she has been eaten up, so to speak, by her rival, has almost completely lost her maritime importance, and is little else but a halting-place for travellers.

There is another remarkable fact which must be taken into account—the way in which the geographic force, like that of heat or electricity, can be transported to a distance, can act at a point remote from its centre, and may even give birth, so to speak, to a secondary city more favourably placed than the first. We may instance the port of Alexandria, which, in spite of its distance from the Nile, is nevertheless the emporium of the whole Nile basin, in the same way as Venice in the port of the Paduan plain, and Marseilles that of the valley of the Rhone.

Next to the advantages of climate and soil come the subterranean riches which sometimes exert a decisive influence on the position of towns. A town rises suddenly on an obviously unfavourable site, where the ground is nevertheless rich in quarrying stone, in pottery clay or marbles, in chemical substances, in metals, in combustible minerals. Thus Potosi, Cerro do Pasco, Virginia City, have sprung up in regions where, but for the presence of veins of silver, no city could ever have been founded. Merthyr Tydvil, Ceuzot, Essen, Scruton, are creations of the coal measures. All the hitherto unused natural forces are giving rise to new cities in precisely the places which were formerly avoided, now at the foot of the cataract, as at Ottawa, now among the high mountains, within reach of the natural conduits of electricity, as in many Swiss valleys. Each new acquisition of man creates a new point of vitality, just as each new organ forms for itself new nervous centres.

In proportion as the domain of civilisation expands and these attractions make themselves felt over a wider area, the towns, belonging themselves to a larger organism, may add to the special advantages which have given them birth advantages of a more general kind, which may secure them an historical rôle of the first importance. Thus Rome, already occupying a central position in relation to the country enclosed within the semicircle of the volcanic Latin hills, found herself also placed in the centre of the oval formed by the Apennines; and later, after the conquest of Italy, her territory occupied the median point of the whole peninsula bounded by the Alps, and marked almost exactly the halfway station between the two extremities of the Mediterranean, the mouths of the Nile and the Straits of Gibraltar. Paris, again, so finely situated near a triple confluence of the water, at the centre of an almost insular river-basin, and towards the middle of a concentric series of geological formations, each containing its special products, has also the great advantage of standing at the convergence of two historic road —the road from Spain by Bayonne and Bordeaux, and the road from Italy by Lyons, Marseilles, and the Cornice; while at the same time it embodies and individualises all the forces of France in relation to her Western neighbours —England, the Netherlands, and Northern Germany. A mere fishing-station at first between two narrow arms of the Seine, the opportunities of Paris were limited to her nets, her barges, and her fertile plain that stretches from the Mont des Martyrs to Mont Geneviève. Next, her confluence of rivers and stream —The Seine, the Marne, the Oureq, the Bièvre— turned her into a fair or market; and the convergent valley of the Oise added its traffic to the rest. The concentric formations developed around the ancient sea-bottom gradually gave an economic importance to their natural centre, and the historic road between the Mediterranean and the ocean made her the nucleus of its traffic.

Of the local advantages of London, seated at the head of the maritime navigation of the Thames, there is little need to speak; for has she not the further privilege of being of all cities of the world the most central —the one most readily accessible, on the whole, from all parts of the globe?

In his interesting work on “The Geographical Position of the Capitals of Europe,” J. G. Kohl shows how Berlin —long a mere village, without other merit than that of affording to the natives an easy passage between the marshes and a solid footing on an islet of the Spree— came, in the process of the historical development of the country, to occupy, upon a navigable waterway of lakes and canals, the halfway station between the Oder and the Elbe, where all the great diagonal highroads of the country naturally meet and cross, from Leipzig to Stettin, from Breslau to Hamburg. In earlier times the Oder, where it reaches the point at which Frankfurt now stands, did not turn off sharply to the right to fall into the Baltic, but continued its course in a north-easterly direction, and emptied itself into the North Sea. This immense river, more than six hundred miles long, passed the very spot now occupied by Berlin, which stands almost in the middle of its ancient valley. The Spree, with its pools and marshes, is but the vestige of that mighty watercourse. The German capital, dominating, as it does, the course of both rivers, commands also the two seas, from Memel to Embden; and it is this position, far more than any artificial centralisation, which gives it its power of attraction. Besides, like all the great cities of the modern world, Berlin has multiplied her natural advantages tenfold, by the converging railway lines which draw the commerce of her own and other countries to her marts and warehouses.

But the development of the capital is, after all, factitious to a great extent; the administrative favours bestowed on it, the crowd of courtiers, functionaries, politicians, and all the interested mob that presses round them, give it too distinctive character to admit of its being studied as a type. It is safer reasoning from the life of cities which owe their oscillations to purely geographical

and historical conditions. There is no more fruitful study for the historian than that of a city whose annals, together with the aspect of the place itself, permit him to verify on the spot the historical changes which have all taken place in accordance with a certain rhythmic rule.

Under such conditions one sees the scene evolve before one's eyes; the fisher's hut; the gardener's hut close by; then a few farms dotting the country-side, a mill-wheel turning in the stream; later on, a watch-tower hanging on the hill. On the other side of the river, where the prow of the ferry-boat has just grazed the bank, some one is building a new hut; an inn, a little shop close to the boatman's house, invite the passenger and the buyer; then on its levelled terrace the marked-place springs up, conspicuous amongst the rest. A broadening track, beaten by the feet of men and animals, runs down from the market-place to the river; a winding path begins to climb the hill; the roadways of the future become distinguishable in the trodden grass of the fields, and house take possession of the green wayside where the cross-roads meet. The little oratory becomes a church; the open scaffolding of the watch-tower gives place to the fortress, the barrack, or the palace; the village grows into a town, and the town into a city. The true way to visit one of these urban agglomerations which has lived a long historic life, is to examine it in the order of its growth, beginning with the site —generally consecrated by some legend— which has served it as a cradle, and ending with its last improvements in factories and warehouses. Every town has its individual character, its personal life, a complexion of its own. One is gay and animated; another keeps a pervading melancholy. Generation after generation, as it passes, leaves behind it this inheritance of character. There are cities that freeze you as you enter with their look on stony hostility; there are other where you are blithe and buoyant as at the sight of a friend.

Other contrasts present themselves in the modes of growth of different cities. Following the direction and importance of its overland commerce, the town projects its suburbs like tentacles along the country roads; if it stand on a river it spreads far down the bank near the places of anchorage and embarkation. One is often struck by the marked inequality of two riverside parts of a city which seem equally well situated to attract the population; but here the cause must be sought in the direction of the current. Thus the plan of Bordeaux suggests at once that the true centre of the inhabited circle should have been on the right bank of the river, at the place occupied by the small suburb of La Bastide. But here the Garonne describes a mighty curve, and sweeps its waters along the quays of the left bank; and where the life of the river flings its force, the life of commerce is necessarily carried with it. The population follows the deeper current, and avoids the oozy banks of the opposite shore.

It has often been suggested that towns have a constant tendency to grow westward. This fact —which is true in many cases— is easily explained, so far as the countries of Western Europe and others of similar climate are concerned, since the western side is the side directly exposed to the purer winds. The inhabitants of these quarters have less to fear from disease than those at the other from its passage over innumerable chimneys, mouths of sewers, and the like, and with the breath of thousands or millions of human beings. Besides, it must not be forgotten that the rich, the idle, and the artist, who have leisure to take in the full delight of the open sky, are much more apt to enjoy the beauties of the twilight than those of the dawn; consciously or unconsciously, they follow the movement of the sun from east to west, and love to see it disappear at last in the resplendent clouds of evening. But there are many exceptions to this normal growth in the direction of the sun. The form and relief of the soil, the charm of the landscape, the direction of

the running waters, the attraction of local industries and commerce, may solicit the advance of men towards any point of the horizon.

By the very fact of its development, the city, like any other organism, tends to die. Subject like the rest to the conditions of time, it finds itself already old while other towns are springing up around it, impatient to live their life in their turn. By force of habit, indeed by the common will of its inhabitants, and by the attraction that every such centre exerts upon the surrounding neighbourhood, it tries to live on; but —not to speak of the mortal accidents which may happen to cities as to men— no human group can incessantly repair its waste and renew its youth without a heavier and heavier expenditure of effort; and sometimes it gets tired. The city must widen its streets and its squares, rebuild its walls, and replace its old and now useless buildings with structures answering to the requirements of the time. While the American town springs into being full-armed and perfectly adapted to its surroundings, Paris —old, encumbered, dirt-encrusted— must keep up a laborious process of reconstruction, which, in the struggle for existence, places her at a great disadvantage in comparison with young cities like New York and Chicago. For the selfsame reasons the huge cities of the Euphrates and the Nile, Babylon and Nineveh, Memphis and Cairo, found themselves successively displaced. Each of these cities —while, thanks to the advantages of its position, it retained its historical importance— was forced to abandon its superannuated quarters and shift its basis further on, in order to escape from its own rubbish, or even from the pestilence arising from its heaps to refuse. Generally speaking, the abandoned site of a town which has moved on is found to be covered with graves.

Other causes of decay, more serious than these, because arising out of the natural development of history, have overtaken many a once famous city; circumstances analogous to those of its birth have rendered its destruction inevitable. Thus the superseding of an old highroad or crossway by some improved mode of conveyance may destroy at one blow a town created by the necessities of transport. Alexandria ruined Pelusium; Carthage in the West Indies gave Puerto Bello back to the solitude of its forest. The demands of commerce and the suppression of piracy have changed the sites of almost all the towns built on the rocky shores of the Mediterranean. Formerly they were perched on rugged hills and girt with thick walls, to defend them from the seigneurs and the corsairs; now they have come down from their fortresses and spread themselves out along the seashore. Everywhere the citadel is exchanged for the esplanade; the Acropolis has come down to the Piraeus.

In our societies, where political institutions have often given a preponderating influence to the will of a single person, it has frequently happened that the caprice of the sovereign has founded a city in a spot where it could never have sprung up of itself. Thus planted on an unnatural site, the new city has not been able to develop without a tremendous waste of living force. Madrid and St. Petersburg, for example, whose primitive huts and hamlets would never have grown into the populous cities of to-day but for Charles the Fifth and Peter the First, were built at an enormous cost. Yet, if they owe their creation to despotism, it is to the associated toil of men that they owe the advantages which have enabled them to live on as if they had had a normal origin; and though the natural relief of the soil had never destined them to become centres of human life, centres they are, thanks to the convergence of artificial communications —roads, railways and canals— and the interchange of thought. For geography is not an immutable thing; it makes and remakes itself day by day; it is modified every hour by the action of men.

But nowadays we hear no more of Caesars building cities for themselves; the city-builders of to-day are the great capitalist, the speculators, the presidents of financial syndicates. We see new

towns spring up in a few months, covering a wide surface, marvellously laid out, splendidly furnished with all the implements of modern life; the school and the museum, even, are not wanting. If the spot is well chosen, these new creations are soon drawn into the general movement of the life of the nations, and Creuzot, Crewe, Barrow-in-Furness, Denver, La Plata, take rank among the recognised centres of population. But if the site is a bad one, the new towns die with the special interests that gave them birth. Chyeyenne City, ceasing to be a railway terminus, sends its cottages forward, so to speak, by next train; and Carson City disappears with the exhausted silver mines which alone had peopled that hideous desert.

But if the caprice of capital sometimes attempts to found cities which the general interest of society condemn to perish, on the other hand it destroys many small centres of population which only ask to live. In the outskirts of Paris itself, do we not see a great banker and landed proprietor adding year by year another two or three hundred acres to his domain, systematically changing cultivated land into plantations, and destroying whole villages to replace them by keepers' lodges built at convenient distances?

Amongst the towns of wholly or partially artificial origin, which answer to no real need of industrial society, must be mentioned also those which exist for purposes of war, at any rate those which have been built in our own day by the great centralised States. It was not so in the days when the city was capable of containing the whole nation, when it was absolutely necessary for purposes of defence to build ramparts following the exterior outline of all quarters of the town, to construct watch-towers at the angles, and to erect alongside the temple, on the summit of the protecting hill, a citadel where the whole body of the citizens could take refuge in case of danger; and when, if the town were separated from its port by a strip of intervening country—as at Athens. Megara, or Corinth—the road from the one to the other must itself be protected by long walls. The whole pile of fortifications explained itself by the nature of things, and took a natural and picturesque place in the landscape. But in our days of extreme division of labour, when the military power has become practically independent of the nation, and no civilian dare advise or meddle in matters of strategy, most fortified towns have a quite unnatural form, in no sort of agreement with the undulations of the soil; they cut the landscape with an outline offensive to the eye. Some of the old Italian engineers at least attempted to give a symmetrical outline to their fortifications by shaping them like an immense Cross or Star of Honour, with its rays, its jewels, its enamels; the white walls of its bastions and redans contrasting regularly with the calm and large placidity of the open fields. But our modern fortresses have no ambition to be beautiful; the thought never enters the head of the strategist; and a mere glance at the plan of the fortifications reveals their monstrous ugliness, their total want of harmony with their surroundings. Instead of following the natural outlines of the country and stretching their arms freely into the fields below, they sit all of a heap, like creatures with cropped ears and amputated limbs. Look at the melancholy form that military science has given to Lille, to Metz, to Strasburg! Even Paris, with all the beauty of her buildings, the grace of her promenades, the charm of her people, is spoiled by her brutal setting in a framework of fortifications. Released from that unpleasant oval in broken lines, the city might have expanded in a natural and aesthetic manner, and taken the simple and gracious form suggested by nature and life.

Another cause of ugliness in our modern towns springs from the invasion of the great manufacturing industries. Almost every town we have is encumbered with one or more suburbs bristling with stinking chimneys, where immense buildings skirt the blackened streets with walls either bare and blind, or pierced, in sickening symmetry, with innumerable windows. The ground trem-

bles under the groaning machinery and beneath the weight of waggons, drays and luggage trains. How many towns there are, especially in young America, where the air is almost unbreathable, and where everything within sigh — the ground, the walls, the sky— seems to sweat mud and soot! Who can recall without a horror of disgust a mining colony like that sinuous and interminable Scranton, whose seventy thousand inhabitants have not so much as a few acres of foul turf and blackened foliage to clear their lungs? And that enormous Pittsburg with its semi-circular coronet of suburbs fuming and flaming overhead, how is it possible to imagine it under a filthier atmosphere than now, though the inhabitants aver that it has gained both in cleanliness and light since the introduction of natural gas into its furnaces? Other towns, less black than these, are scarcely less hideous, from the fact that the railway companies have taken possessions of streets, squares, and avenues, and send their locomotives snorting and hissing along the road, and scattering the people right and left from their course. Some of the loveliest sites on the earth have been thus desecrated. At Buffalo, for instance, the passenger strives in vain to follow the bank of the wonderful Niagara across a wilderness, of rails and quagmires and slimy canals, of gravel heaps and dunghills, and all the others impurities of the city.

Another barbarous speculation is that which sacrifices the beauty of the streets by letting the ground in lots, on which the contractors build whole districts, designed beforehand by architects who have never so much as visited the spot, far less taken the trouble to consult the future inhabitants. They erect here a Gothic church for the Episcopalians, there a Norman structure for the Presbyterians, and a little further on a sort Pantheon for the Baptist; they map out their streets in squares and lozenges, varying grotesquely the geometrical designs of the interspaces and the style of the houses, while religiously reserving the best corners for the grog-shops. The absurdity of the whole heterogeneous mixture is aggravated in most of our cities by the intervention of official art, which insists on the types of architecture following a given pattern.

But even if the rich contractor and the official Maecenas were always men of cultivated taste, the towns would still present a painful contrast between luxury and squalor, between the sumptuous and insolent splendour of some quarters, and the sordid misery of the others, where the low and crooked walls hide courts oozing with damp, and starving families crouched under tumble-down styes of lath or stone. Even in towns where the authorities seek to veil all this behind a decent mask of whitewashed enclosures, misery still stalks outside, and one knows that death is carrying on its cruel work within. Which of our cities has not its Whitechapel and its Mile End Road? Handsome and imposing as they may be to the outward eye, each has its secret or apparent vices, its fatal defect, its chronic malady which must end by killing it, unless a free and pure circulation can be re-established throughout the whole organism. But from this point of view the question of public buildings involves the whole social question itself. Will the time ever come when all men, without exception, shall breathe fresh air in abundance, enjoy the light and sunshine, taste the coolness of the shade and the scent of roses, and feed their children without fear that the bread will run short in the bin? At any rate, all those of us who have not reserved their ideal for a future life, but think a little also of the present existence of man, must regard as intolerable any ideal of society which does not include the deliverance of humanity from mere hunger.

For the rest, those who govern the cities are mostly governed themselves —often against their will— by the very just idea that the town is a collective organism, of which every separate cellule has to be kept in perfect health. The great business of municipalities is always that which relates to sanitation. History warns them that disease is no respecter of persons, and that it is dangerous

to leave the pestilence to depopulate the hovels at the back door of the palace. In some places they go so far as to demolish the infected quarters altogether, not considering that the families they expel can only rebuilt their habitations a little further on, and perhaps carry the poison into more wholesome regions. But, even where these sinks of disease are left untouched, everybody agrees as to the importance of a thorough general sanitation —the cleansing of the streets, the opening of gardens and grassy spaces shadowed by tall trees, the instant removal of refuse, and the supply of pure and abundant water to every district and every house. In matters of this kind a peaceful competition is going on among the towns of the more advanced nations, and each is trying its particular experiments in the way of cleanliness and comfort. The definitive formula, indeed, has not yet been found; for the urban organism cannot be made to carry on its provisioning, its sanguine and nervous circulation, the repair of its forces and the expulsion of its waste, by an automatic process. But at least, many towns have been so far improved that life there is wholesomer on the average than that of many country places where the inhabitants breathe day by day the reek of the dunghill, and live in primitive ignorance of the simplest laws of hygiene.

The consciousness of a collective urban life is shown, again, by the artist efforts of the municipalities. Like ancient Athens, like Florence and the other free cities of the Middle Ages, every one of our modern towns is bent on beautifying itself; hardly the humblest village is without its bell-tower, its column, or its sculptured fountain. Dismally bad art it is, most of it, this work designed by qualified professors under the supervision of a committee; and the more ignorant, the more certain it is to be pretentious. Real art would go its committee. These little gentlemen of the municipal councils are like the Roman General Mummius, who was quite willing to give orders that his soldiers should repaint every picture they injured; they mistake symmetry for beauty, and think that identical reproductions will give their towns a Parthenon or a St. Mark's.

And even if they could indeed recreate such works as they require the architects to copy, it would be none the less an outrage on nature; for no building is complete without the atmosphere of time and place that gave it birth. Every town has its own life, its own features, its own form, with what veneration should the builder approach it! It is a sort of offence against the person to take away the individuality of a town, and overlay it with conventional buildings and contradictory monuments out of all relation to its actual character and history. We are told that in Edinburgh, the lovely Scottish capital, pious hands are at work in quite another way; breaking in upon its picturesque but unclean wynds, and transforming them gradually, house by house —leaving every inhabitant at home as before, but in a cleaner and more beautiful home, where the air and light come through; grouping friends with friends, and giving them places of reunion for social intercourse and the enjoyment of art. Little by little a whole street, retaining its original character, only without the dirt and smells, comes out fresh and crisp, like the flower springing clean beneath the foot without a single sod being stirred around the mother plant.

Thus, by destruction or by restoration, the towns are for ever being renewed where they stand; and this process will doubtless go on accelerating under the pressure of the inhabitants themselves. As men modify their own ideal of life, they must necessarily change, in accordance with it, that ampler corporeity which constitutes their dwelling. The town reflects the spirit of the society which creates it. If peace and goodwill establish themselves among men, there can be no doubt that the disposition and aspect of the cities will respond to the new needs which will spring out of the great reconciliation. In the first place, the hopelessly sordid and unhealthy parts of the city will be improved off the face of the earth, or will be represented only by groups of

houses freely planted among trees, pleasant to look at, full of light and air. The richer quarters, now handsome to the eye, but often both inconvenient and insanitary nevertheless, will be similarly transformed. The hostile or exclusive character which the spirit of individual ownership now gives to private dwellings will have disappeared; the gardens will no longer be hidden out of sight by inhospitable walls; the lawns and flower-beds and plantations which surround the house will run down by shady walks to the public promenades outside, as they do already in some English and American University towns. The predominance of the common life over a strictly enclosed and jealously guarded private will have attached many a private house to an organic group of schools or phalansteries. Here also large spaces will be thrown open to admit the air and give a better appearance to the whole.

Obviously, the towns which are already growing so fast will grow yet faster, or rather they will melt gradually into the distant country, and throughout the length and breadth of the land the provinces will be scattered with houses which, in spite of the distance, really belong to the town. London, compact as it is in its central districts, is a splendid example of this dispersion of the urban population among the fields and forests for a hundred miles round, and even down to the seaside. Hundreds of thousands of people who have their business in town, and who, as far as their work is concerned, are active citizens, pass their hours of repose and domestic fellowship under the shadow of tall trees, by running brooks, or within sound of the dashing waves. The very heart of London, the City properly so-called, is little but a great Exchange by day, depopulated by night; the active centres of government, of legislation, of science and art, cluster round this great focus of energy, increasing year by year, and elbowing out the resident population into the suburbs. It is the same, again, in Paris, where the central nucleus, with its barracks, its tribunals, and its prisons, presents a military and strategical rather than a residential aspect.

The normal development of the great towns, according to our modern ideal, consists, then, in combining the advantages of town and country life, —the air and scenery and delightful solitude of the one with the facile communication and the subterranean service of force, light, and water which belong to the other. What was once the most densely inhabited part of the city is precisely the part which is now becoming deserted, because it is becoming common property, or at least a common centre of intermittent life. Too useful to the mass of the citizens to be monopolised by private families, the heart of the city is the patrimony of all. It is the same, for the same reasons, with the subordinate nuclei of population; and the community claims, besides, the use of the open spaces of the city for public meetings and open-air celebrations. Every town should have its agora, where all who are animated by a common passion can meet together. Such an agora is Hyde Park, which, with a little packing, could hold a million persons.

For other reasons, again, the city tends to become less dense, and to open out a little in its central regions. Many institutions originally planted in the heart of the town are moving out into the country. Schools, colleges, hospitals, almshouses, convents, are out of place in a city. Only the district schools should be retained within its limits, and these surrounded with gardens; and only such hospitals as are absolutely indispensable for accidents or sudden illness. The transferred establishments are still dependencies of the town, detached from it in point of place, but continuing their vital relation with it; they are so many fragments of the city planted out in the country. The only obstacle to the indefinite extension of the towns and their perfect fusion with the country comes not so much from the distance as the costliness of communication, for, in less time than it takes to walk from one end of the town to the other, one may reach by rail the solitude of the

fields or the sea at a distance of sixty or seventy miles. But this limitation to the free use of the railroad by the poor is gradually giving way before the advance of social evolution.

Thus this type of the ancient town, sharply outlined by walls and fosses, tends more and more to disappear. While the countryman becomes more and more a citizen in thought and mode of life, the citizen turns his face to the country and aspires to be a countryman. By virtue of its very growth, the modern town loses its isolated existence and tends to merge itself with other towns, and to recover the original relation that united the rising market-place with the country from which it sprang. Man must have the double advantage of access to the delights of the town, with its solidarity of thought and interest, its opportunities of study and the pursuit of art, and, with this, the liberty that lives in the liberty of nature and finds scope in the range of her ample horizon.

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Elisée Reclus
The Evolution of Cities
1895

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The Feeling for Nature in Modern Society

Elisée Reclus

1866

It becomes ever more essential to expand and refine our feeling for nature as the multitude of men who are exiled from the countryside by force of circumstances increases daily. Pessimists have long feared the ceaseless growth of large cities. Still, they seldom realize how rapidly future populations will be able to move toward preferred centers.

It is true that the colossal Babylons of the past also gathered within their walls hundreds of thousands or even millions of inhabitants. The natural interests of commerce, the despotic centralization of all power, the scrambling for favors, and the pursuit of pleasure made these powerful cities as populous as entire provinces. But factors such as slow transportation, the flooding of a river, bad weather, the delay of a caravan, a raid by an enemy army, or a tribal uprising could result in provisions sometimes being delayed or halted. The great city, in the midst of all its splendors, found itself in constant danger of starvation. Moreover, during periods of relentless war, these enormous capitals always ended up as an arena for an immense slaughter, and sometimes the destruction was so complete that the ruin of a city meant the end of a people. Even quite recently, we were able to see, through the example of several cities in China, what fate could befall great urban centers under the sway of ancient civilizations. The powerful city of Nanjing was reduced to a heap of ruins, while Wuchang, which about fifteen years ago appeared to be the most populous city in the entire world, lost more than three-fourths of its inhabitants.

While traditional causes of population shifts to large cities still operate, there are now other no less powerful causes that relate to the whole of modern progress. Transportation routes, canals, secondary roads, and railroads radiate in increasing numbers from important centers and surround them with an increasingly dense network of links. Today's transportation is so smooth that during a single day the railways can deliver five hundred thousand persons to the streets of London or Paris, and in anticipation of a simple holiday, a wedding, a funeral, or the visit of a celebrity, millions have sometimes swelled the fluctuating population of a capital. And provisions can be transported just as easily as travelers. From the surrounding countryside, outlying parts of the country, and all corners of the world, commodities flow by land and sea toward these enormous stomachs that endlessly consume more and more. If it were necessary for the demands of its appetite, London could have more than half of the earth's produce transported to it in less than a year.

This is certainly an enormous advantage that the large cities of antiquity did not have, yet the revolution in social practices brought about by railroads and other modes of transportation has

hardly begun. After all, what is an average of two or three trips per year for each inhabitant of France, especially when a brief excursion of fifteen minutes to the suburbs of Paris or some other large city is considered a trip for the statistics? Each year, the multitude of travelers will doubtless increase in enormous proportions, and all expectations will probably be surpassed, as they have been since the beginning of the century. Thus the amount of travel in London alone is currently as great in a single week as it was during an entire year in all of Great Britain around 1830. Thanks to the railroads, regions are constantly becoming smaller. One can even mathematically calculate the rate at which this shrinking of the land is taking place merely by comparing the speed of locomotives to that of the stagecoaches and rickety carriages that they replaced. For his part, man turns his back on his native soil more and more easily. He becomes a nomad—not like the shepherds of the past, who always followed their usual paths and never failed to return periodically to the same pastures with their flocks, but in a manner much more complete since he indiscriminately heads in one direction or another, wherever his interest or desire impels him. A very small number of these voluntary exiles return to die in their native land. This endlessly growing migration of peoples is now taking place by millions upon millions, and it is precisely toward the most populous human anthills that the great multitude of immigrants makes its way. From an ethnological point of view, the fearsome invasion of Frankish warriors into Roman Gaul was perhaps not as important as the silent migration of street sweepers from Luxembourg and the Palatinate who each year swell the population of Paris.

To get an idea of what the great commercial cities of the world could become if the causes of growth are not sooner or later counterbalanced by opposing factors, one can simply observe the enormous importance of cities in modern colonial societies relative to villages and isolated households. The populations of these regions, released from the bonds of custom, and free to congregate as they please, with no motive except their own will, amass overwhelmingly in the cities. Even in specifically agricultural settlements such as the young American states of the Far West, the regions of La Plata, Queensland in Australia, and the North Island of New Zealand, the urban population surpasses that of the countryside. On average it is at least three times greater and constantly increases in proportion to the development of commerce and industry. In settlements such as Victoria and California, where specific factors such as gold mines and great commercial advantages attract multitudes of speculators, the concentration of city dwellers is greater still. If Paris were to France what San Francisco is to California and what Melbourne is to sunny Australia, the “big city” would really live up to its name, having no less than nine to ten million people. Clearly, it is in all these new countries, where civilized man has only recently established himself, that one can see the external expression of the ideal of nineteenth-century society: no obstacle prevented the newcomers from spreading out in small groups over the entire region, yet they preferred to gather in vast cities. The contrast between Hungary or Russia and any modern colony such as California illustrates how great a gap of centuries separates countries whose populations are still distributed as in the Middle Ages from those where the phenomena of social affinity developed by modern civilization can have free play. On the plains of Russia and in the Hungarian *puszta*, there are hardly any true cities, but only more or less large villages. The capital cities are administrative centers, artificial creations that the inhabitants could easily do without and that would immediately lose a sizable share of their importance if the government did not maintain a factitious life there at the expense of the rest of the nation. In these countries the working population is composed of farmers, and the cities exist only for office workers and men of leisure. By contrast, in Australia and California the countryside is never more than a suburb,

and its inhabitants, shepherds and farmers, have their minds on the city. They are speculators who have temporarily withdrawn from the great commercial center for the sake of their business but who will inevitably return to it. Doubtless, the Russian peasants who are now so firmly rooted in their native soil will sooner or later discover how to free themselves from the fields on which only yesterday they were subjugated. Like the British and the Australians, they will become nomads and make their way to the big cities, beckoned by commerce and industry and compelled by their own ambition to see, to know, or to improve their condition.

The complaints of those who lament the depopulation of the countryside cannot stop the movement. Nothing will stop it, and all the outcry is useless. Thanks to easier and cheaper travel, the tenant farmer has gained the fundamental liberty to “come and go,” from which all other liberties eventually proceed, and he follows his natural inclination when he heads for the crowded city, about which he has heard so many wonderful tales. Sad and joyful at the same time, he bids farewell to the lowly hovel of his birth to gaze upon the miracles of industry and architecture. Although he gives up the regular and dependable wages from his manual labor, perhaps he will succeed, like so many other sons of his village, in becoming comfortably well-off or even wealthy. And if he returns home one day it will be to build a castle in place of the squalid dwelling where he was born. However, very few immigrants realize such dreams of fortune, though many find poverty, disease, and a premature death in the big cities. But at least those who survive are able to broaden the horizon of their ideas. They have seen regions that differ from one another, developed themselves through contact with other men, and become more intelligent and educated, and all these individual advancements constitute an invaluable asset for society as a whole.

In France, we know how rapidly the phenomenon of the migration of rural populations toward Paris, Lyons, Toulouse, and the large seaports takes place. All population growth occurs in these centers of attraction, whereas the number of inhabitants in most of the small towns and villages remains stationary or even declines. More than half of the *départements* are becoming less and less populated, and one can be cited, that of Basses-Alpes, which since the Middle Ages has undoubtedly lost a good third of its inhabitants. If one also takes into account visits and temporary migrations, which necessarily produce an increase in the fluctuating population of the big cities, the results are even more striking. In the Pyrenees of Ariège, there are certain villages that all the inhabitants, both men and women, abandon in the winter in order to go to the cities of the plains. Finally, most Frenchmen who are in business or who live off their investments—not counting the multitudes of peasants and workers—are certain to visit Paris and the main cities of France. And it has been a very long time since, in remote provinces, a wayfaring laborer was named after the large city in which he lived. The same social phenomena are occurring in England and Germany. Although in these two countries the excess of births over deaths is much greater than in France, some agricultural areas such as the duchy of Hesse-Cassel and the county of Cambridge are also losing population to the large cities. Even in North America, where the population is increasing at an astonishing rate, a great number of agricultural areas in New England have lost a large proportion of their inhabitants because of a double migration: on the one hand, there is a movement toward the regions of the Far West, and on the other, toward the coastal commercial cities of Portland, Boston, and New York.

However, it is a well-known fact that in the cities the air is full of deadly substances. Although the official statistics on this matter are not always as candid as we would like them to be, it is nonetheless certain that in all countries of Europe and America, the average life-span among rural populations exceeds that of the city dwellers by several years. Immigrants who leave their

native soil for the narrow and foul-smelling streets of a big city could calculate in advance the approximate extent to which they are shortening their lives according to the laws of probability. Not only does the newcomer suffer personally and risk an early death, he also dooms his descendants. It is known that in large cities such as London and Paris the life force is quickly exhausted, and that no bourgeois family living there survives beyond the third or at most the fourth generation. If the individual can resist the deadly effects of his environment, his family will still succumb in the end, and without the continuous migration of country people and foreigners who march happily to their death, the capital cities could not recruit their enormous populations. The city dweller's character becomes refined, but the body weakens and the springs of life dry up. Likewise, from an intellectual point of view, all the brilliant faculties developed by social life are at first overstimulated, but the mind gradually loses its powers. It becomes weary and finally declines prematurely. The street urchin of Paris, compared to the young peasant, is certainly a being full of life and high spirits. But is he not the brother of the pale hoodlum who can be compared physically and morally to sickly plants vegetating in dark cellars? In fact, it is in the cities, especially those most renowned for their opulence and civilization, that one finds the most degraded of all men. They are poor beings without hope, whom filth, hunger, coarse ignorance, and general contempt have placed far below the happy savage wandering through forests and mountains. One finds the rankest abjection side by side with the most magnificent splendor. Not far from museums where the beauty of the human body is displayed in all its glory, spindly children warm themselves in the foul atmosphere emanating from sewers.

If steam power brings endlessly growing crowds to the cities, it also brings back to the countryside an ever-growing number of city dwellers who go to breathe the open air for a while and refresh their minds among flowers and greenery. The wealthy, free to create leisure time as they please, can escape their occupations and the weary pleasures of the city for months at a time. There are even those who live in the countryside and make only fleeting appearances at their city residences. As for the workers of all types, who cannot leave for long periods because of the demands of everyday life, most manage nevertheless to take enough time off from their jobs to visit the countryside. The most fortunate among them take weeks of vacation, which they spend far from the capital, in the mountains or at the seashore. Those who are the most enslaved by their work content themselves with an occasional escape from the narrow horizons of their accustomed streets for a few hours. Naturally, they happily take advantage of their holidays when the weather is mild and the sky is clear. At such times, every tree in the woods near the big cities shelters a happy family. A considerable proportion of merchants and clerks, especially in England and America, bravely establish their wives and children in the countryside and sentence themselves to traveling twice per day the distance that separates the sales counter from the domestic hearth. Thanks to the speed of transportation, millions of men can lead the double lives of city and country dweller, and each year, the number of persons who thus divide their lives constantly grows. Each morning, hundreds of thousands converge on London to plunge into the whirlwind of business in the big city, and then return each evening to their peaceful homes in the verdant suburbs. The city, the true center of the business world, is losing its residents. By day, it is the most active human beehive; by night, it is a desert.

Unfortunately, this reflux from the cities toward the outskirts does not occur without defacing the countryside. Not only does debris of all sorts clutter the intermediate space between city and field, but even worse, speculators grab up all the charming sites in the vicinity, divide them into rectangular plots, enclose them with monotonous walls, and then build hundreds and thousands

of pretentious little houses. To pedestrians wandering along the muddy roads in this would-be countryside, the only nature in evidence is the trimmed shrubs and clumps of flowers glimpsed through the fences. At the seashore, many of the most picturesque cliffs and charming beaches are snatched up either by covetous landlords or by speculators who appreciate the beauties of nature in the spirit of a money changer appraising a gold ingot. In frequently visited mountainous areas, the same mania of appropriation seizes the inhabitants. Landscapes are carved up into squares and sold to the highest bidder. Each natural curiosity, be it rock, grotto, waterfall, or the fissure of a glacier—everything, even the sound of an echo—can become individual property. The entrepreneurs lease waterfalls and enclose them with wooden fences to prevent non-paying travelers from gazing at the turbulent waters. Then, through a deluge of advertising, the light that plays about the scattering droplets and the puffs of wind unfurling curtains of mist are transformed into the resounding jingle of silver.

Since nature is so often desecrated by speculators precisely because of its beauty, it is not surprising that farmers and industrialists, in their own exploitative endeavors, fail to consider whether they contribute to defacing the land. Certainly the “sturdy plowman” cares very little for the charm of the countryside and the harmony of the landscape, so long as the soil produces abundant harvests. Walking around the thickets at random with his ax, he cuts down trees that are in his way and shamefully mutilates others, giving them the appearance of posts or brooms. Vast regions which formerly were beautiful to behold and enjoyable to travel through are completely spoiled, and one actually experiences disgust upon seeing them. Moreover, it often happens that the farmer, as lacking in science as he is in love of nature, errs in his calculations and causes his own ruin through certain changes that he unwittingly introduces into the environment. Similarly, it matters little to the industrialist, operating his mine or factory in the middle of the countryside, whether he blackens the atmosphere with fumes from the coal or contaminates it with foulsmelling vapors. In Western Europe, not to mention England, there are a great many industrial valleys whose thick air is almost unbreathable to outsiders. The houses there are filled with smoke, and even the leaves on the trees are coated with soot. The sun almost always shows its yellowish face through a thick haze. As for the engineer, his bridges and viaducts always look the same, whether on the flattest of plains or in the gorges of the steepest mountains. He is concerned not with making his work harmonious with the landscape, but solely with balancing the thrust and resistance of his materials.

Certainly, man must take possession of the earth’s surface and know how to utilize its forces. However, one cannot help lamenting the brutality with which this process is carried out. And so when the geologist Marcou¹ informs us that Niagara Falls has noticeably decreased in flow and lost its beauty since it was diverted to operate factories on its banks, we think sadly of a time not long ago when the “thunderous waters,” unknown to civilized man, tumbled freely over the high cliffs between two walls of rock completely covered with large trees. Similarly, one wonders whether the vast prairies and wild forests, where one can still imagine seeing the noble figures of Chingachgook and Leatherstocking,² could have been succeeded by something other than fields of equal size, all aligned with the points of the compass, in accordance with the land survey, and enclosed uniformly with fences of a standard height. Wild nature is so

¹ Jules Marcou (1824–98) was a French geologist who did extensive study of the Jura Mountains and North America. He produced geological maps of the United States, the British provinces of North America, and the world, and cofounded the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

² Characters in *The Leatherstocking Tales*, a series of historical novels by James Fenimore Cooper.

beautiful. Is it really necessary for man, in seizing it, to proceed with mathematical precision in exploiting each new conquered domain and then mark his possession with vulgar constructions and perfectly straight boundaries? If this continues to occur, the harmonious contrasts that are one of the beauties of the earth will soon give way to a depressing uniformity. Since society is increasing its population by at least ten million per year and has at its disposal through science and industry forces that are growing at a phenomenal rate, it is marching rapidly toward the conquest of the entire surface of the planet. The day is approaching when there will remain no region on any continent that has not been visited by a civilized pioneer, and sooner or later, the effects of human labor will extend to every point on the surface of the earth. Fortunately, a complete alliance of the beautiful and the useful is possible. It is precisely in the countries where industrialized agriculture is most advanced—in England, Lombardy, and certain parts of Switzerland—that those who exploit the soil know how to make it produce the highest yields while at the same time respecting the charm of the landscape, or even adding artfully to its beauty. The marshes and bogs of Flanders, transformed by drainage into extremely fertile countryside; the rocky Crau, changed into a magnificent prairie thanks to irrigation canals; the rocky slopes of the maritime Apennines and Alps, covered from base to summit with the foliage of olive trees; and the reddish peat bogs of Ireland, replaced by forests of larch, cedar, and silver fir—are these not admirable examples of this power by which the farmer exploits the land for his benefit while at the same time rendering it more beautiful?

The question of knowing which of the works of man serves to beautify and which contributes to the degradation of external nature can seem pointless to so-called practical minds; nevertheless, it is a matter of the greatest importance. Humanity's development is most intimately connected with the nature that surrounds it. A secret harmony exists between the earth and the peoples whom it nourishes, and when reckless societies allow themselves to meddle with that which creates the beauty of their domain, they always end up regretting it. In places where the land has been defaced, where all poetry has disappeared from the countryside, the imagination is extinguished, the mind becomes impoverished, and routine and servility seize the soul, inclining it toward torpor and death. Throughout the history of humanity, foremost among the causes that have vanquished so many successive civilizations is the brutal violence with which most nations have treated the nourishing earth. They cut down forests, caused springs to dry up and rivers to overflow, damaged environments, and encircled cities with foul-smelling marshes. Then, when nature thus desecrated turned hostile toward them, they came to hate it, and, unlike the savage, who could immerse himself in the life of the forest, they increasingly allowed themselves to succumb to the stupefying despotism of priests and kings. "The great estates have ruined Italy," said Pliny, and it must be added that these great estates, cultivated by slaves' hands, defaced the land like leprosy. Historians, struck by the astonishing decline of Spain since Charles the Fifth, have tried to explain it in various ways. According to some, the principal cause of that nation's downfall was the discovery of gold in America; others claim that it was the religious terror organized by the "holy brotherhood" of the Inquisition, the expulsion of the Jews and the Moors, and the bloody autos-da-fé of the heretics. They have also blamed the fall of Spain on the unfair tax of the alcabala and the despotic centralization in the French manner.³ But did the Spanish passion

³ The alcabala was a general sales tax established in Spain in the Middle Ages. Over the centuries, it increased from 5 percent to as much as 20 percent. It was at times perhaps the largest single source of revenue for the crown but was notoriously unpopular and is thought to have had a detrimental effect on industry and trade.

for cutting down trees due to their fear of birds, “por miedo de los pajaritos,” contribute nothing to this terrible decline? The earth, yellow, rocky, and naked, has taken on a repugnant and fearsome appearance: the soil is impoverished, and the population, which has been decreasing for two centuries, has to an extent lapsed into barbarism. The little birds are avenged.

Therefore, we must now enthusiastically welcome the generous passion that induces so many men (and we declare them to be the best among men) to traverse virgin forests, beaches, and mountain gorges, in short, to visit nature in all regions of the earth that have retained their original beauty. Threatened with intellectual and moral decline, one feels the need to see the great sights of the earth in order to counterbalance at all costs the vulgarity of all the ugliness and mediocrity that narrow minds view as evidence of modern civilization. The direct study of nature and the contemplation of its phenomena must become for all well-rounded men one of the fundamental elements of education. It is also essential for each individual to develop muscular dexterity and strength so that he can enjoy climbing to the peaks of mountains, look fearlessly into abysses, and keep in his entire physical being that natural balance of forces without which one can perceive the most beautiful settings only through a veil of sadness and melancholy. Modern man must unite in his being all of the virtues of those who have preceded him on earth. Without giving up any of the great privileges that civilization has conferred on him, neither must he lose any of his ancient strength, nor allow himself to be surpassed by any savage in vigor, dexterity, or in knowledge of natural phenomena. In the splendid epoch of the Greek republics, the Hellenes undertook nothing less than to make their children heroes through grace, strength, and courage. In the same way, it is by awakening in the younger generations all of the qualities of manliness and by bringing them back to nature and making them come to grips with it that modern societies can be insured against all decline through the regeneration of the race itself.

Rumford said a long time ago that “one always finds in nature more than one is looking for.”⁴ Whether the scholar examines clouds or stones, plants or insects, or whether he goes further and studies the general laws of the world, he continually discovers unexpected wonders everywhere. The artist who seeks out beautiful landscapes encounters a continual feast for the eyes and mind. The industrialist who tries to make use of what the earth produces inevitably sees around him unutilized riches. As for the simple man who is content to love nature for itself, he finds in it his joy, and when he is unhappy, his sorrows are at least mitigated by the sight of the wild countryside. Certainly, outcasts or even those poor *déclassés* who live like exiles in their own homeland always feel isolated, unknown, and friendless, even in the most charming settings, and they suffer the constant ache of despair. However, in the end they also experience the gentle influence of their environment, and their most intense bitterness gradually changes into a sort of melancholy that allows them to comprehend, with a sensibility refined by sadness, all that the earth has to offer in grace and beauty. Even more than those who are happy, they know how to appreciate the rustling of leaves, the songs of birds, and the murmur of springs. And if nature has the power to console or to strengthen individuals, what could it do over the course of centuries for whole peoples? Without a doubt, magnificent vistas greatly contribute to the qualities of mountain populations, and it is no mere figure of speech to call the Alps the boulevard of liberty.

⁴ Count Rumford (1753–1814), born Benjamin Thompson in Massachusetts, was a scientist, inventor, nutritionist, and social reformer who, because of British sympathies, left for Great Britain in 1776. Rumford is primarily known for his work on the nature of heat, for his improvements to fireplaces, and for playing a large role in founding the Royal Institution of Great Britain in 1800.

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Elisée Reclus
The Feeling for Nature in Modern Society
1866

Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisée Reclus.

The following discussion is taken from the relatively early article “Du sentiment de la nature dans les sociétés modernes,” which was published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* 63 (May–June 1866): 352–81. It is noteworthy as an example of Reclus’ view of nature in his earlier work. Most of the social analysis in the three-part essay appears in the third section (371–81), which is translated here.

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The Great Kinship Of Humans and Fauna

Elisée Reclus

1933

Man loves to live in dreams. The effort which Thought must put forth in order to seize hold of realities seems to him too hard, and he tries to escape the task by taking refuge in opinions ready-made. If “doubt is the pillow of the wise,” we may say that blissful faith is the pillow of the weak in mind. There was a time when the power of a supreme God, who thought for us, who willed and acted over our heads, and directed human destiny in accordance with his own caprice, was amply sufficient for us, and caused us to accept our mortal lot with resignation or even with gratitude. Now this personal God, in whom the meek reposed their confidence, is perishing in his own temples, and men have to find a substitute for him. But there exists no longer any almighty power on which they can count; they only have a few words, to which they seek to give as it were a mystic force — as it were a magic virtue; for example, the word “progress”.

No doubt it is true that in many respects man has progressed; his sensations have (I indeed think) become more refined, his thoughts keener and more profound, and his humanity, embracing a vaster world, has prodigiously grown in breadth. But no progress can establish itself without a partial retrogression. The human creature grows, but in growing changes his place, and in the act of advancing he loses a part of the ground, which once he occupied. The ideal would be that civilised men should have preserved the force of the savage, that he should also have his skill, that he should still possess a perfect balance of limb, native health, tranquillity of the moral nature, simplicity of life, intimacy with the animals and the fields, and the harmony with the earth and all that inhabits it. But what was once the rule is now the exception. Many examples no doubt prove to us that the man of energetic will, exceptionally favoured by his surroundings, can quite rival the savage in all his primitive attainments, while at the same time adding thereto a consciousness saturated by a higher soul. But how are there those who have gained without losing, who are at once the equals of primitive man in his forest or prairie, and the equals of the artist or modern savant in the turmoil of city life?

And if here or there a man, unique in force of will and dignity of action, succeeds in rivalling his ancestors in respect of their native qualities, while also outstripping them by reason of those acquired, one may say with regret that, as a whole, mankind has certainly lost some of its early winnings. Thus, the world of animals, from which we derive our genesis and which was our tutor in the art of existence, which taught us fishing and the chase, and the rudiments of healing and of house construction, the habits of work in common, and the storing of food — this world has become a stranger to us. We today, in regard to the animals, talk of education or domestication

simply in the sense of enslavement, but primitive man was thinking of a fraternal association. He saw in these living beings companions, and not servants; and indeed in many cases, as of common calamity (especially in times of storm or flood), the beasts — dogs, birds, serpents — came and took refuge with him.

The Indian woman of the Brazils surrounds herself quite wittingly with a regular menagerie, and her cabin will have in the surrounding clearing tapirs, deer, opossums, and even tame jaguars. There one sees monkeys gambolling in the branches over the hut, peccaries rooting in the soil, toucans, hoccas¹ and parrots perching here or there on the swinging branches, protected by dogs and great trumpeter birds². And this whole republic moves and has its being without any necessity for a cross-grained mistress to deal out insults and blows. The Quichuan shepherd, crossing the plateau of the Andes by the side of the llama and his burden, has never attempted to gain the assistance of the loved animal otherwise than by caresses and encouragement; a single act of violence, and the llama, his personal dignity offended, would lie down in wrath and refuse to rise. He walks at his own pace, never allows his burden to be too great, stands still a long time at sunrise to contemplate the ascending orb, expects to be crowned with flowers and ribbons, or to have a flag poised on his head, and desires the children and women, on his arrival at the huts, to flatter and caress him.

Does not the horse of the Bedouin — another primitive man — come into the tent? And do not the weaning children sleep between his legs? The natural sympathy existing between all these creatures harmonised them in a broad atmosphere of peace and love. The bird would come and perch on the hand of man, as he does even today on the horns of the bull, and the squirrel would frolic within arm's reach of the field-worker or the shepherd.

Even in their political communities primitive folk did not overlook the animal. In Fazokl, when the people depose a king, they are accustomed to address him as follows: "Since you have ceased to be pleasing to the men, the women, the children, and the donkeys, the best you can do is die, and to that end we will assist you."³ In old times men and animals had no secrets from one another. "The beast talked," so the story goes; but the main thing was that Man understood. Are there any stories more charming than the tales of South India — perhaps the oldest legends in the world — transmitted to the Dravidian invaders by the aborigines? In them elephants, jackals, tigers, lions, jerboas, serpents, crabs, monkeys, and men, hold converse in all freedom, thus constituting, so to speak, the great reciprocal school of the primitive world, and in this school it is more often the animal that is the real teacher.

Associations between man and the animals included, in those early times, a much greater number of species than we find today in our domestic sphere. Geoffroy St. Hilaire spoke of forty-seven, which thus formed, as it were, the retinue of Man; but how many species which he did not mention dwelt of old in intimacy with their youngest born brother! He did not include the many companions of the Indian woman of Guiana, nor the snakes which the Dinkaman on the Nile calls by name, and with which he shares the milk of his cows, nor the rhinoceros that pasture along with other cattle on the meadows of Assam, nor the crocodiles of the Indus, which the Hindu artists show decorated with sacred emblems. Archaeologists have proved beyond doubt that the

¹ A name given by Cuvier to birds of the genus Crax.

² Oiseaux adamis. The agami, or trumpeter bird, "is about the size of a large fowl, is kept in Guiana, of which it is a native, with poultry, which it is said to defend, and shows a strong attachment to the person by whom it is fed." — Lloyd's dictionary.

³ Lepsius, *Letters from Egypt*

Egyptians of the ancient empire had, among their herds of domestic animals, three, or even four, species of antelope, and one of wild goat, all of them creatures which, having once been associated with man, have become wild again. Even the hyena-like dogs and the guepards⁴ had once been transformed by hunters into faithful allies. The Rig Veda sings the praise of messenger pigeons “swifter than the clouds.” It sees in them gods and goddesses, and exhorts that burnt sacrifices should be prepared and libations poured out for them. Without a doubt, the mythic story of the Flood recalls to us the skill of our earliest ancestors in the art of making use of the carrier pigeon’s fleetness. It was the dove that Noah sent forth from the Ark to explore the waste of waters and the reappearing lands, which brought back in its beak the branch of olive.

And we may say that in many respects the domestication of animals, as we practice it today, exhibits a veritable moral backsliding, for, far from having improved them, we have deformed, degraded and corrupted them. We have, it is true, been able, by selection of specimens, to augment in the animal such and such quality of strength, of skill, of scent, of swiftness; but in our role of flesh-eaters our great preoccupation has been to augment certain four-footed masses of meat and fat — to provide ourselves with stores of walking flesh, moving with difficulty from dung-heap to the slaughterhouse. Can we truly say that the pig is superior to the wild boar, or the timid sheep to the intrepid mouflon? The noble art of breeders is to castrate their beasts, or to create hybrids, which are incapable of reproduction. They train horses “by means of bit, whip and spur,” and then complain that these exhibit no mental initiative. Even when domesticating the animals under the most favourable conditions, they diminish their powers of resistance to disease and their adaptability to new surroundings, making of them artificial creatures, incapable of self-support in the freedom of Nature.

The corruption of species is already a great evil, but civilised science tends also to their extermination. It is notorious how many birds have been destroyed by European sportsmen in New Zealand and Australia, in Madagascar, and in the polar archipelago; how many walrus and other cetacea have already disappeared. The whale has fled from our more temperate seas, and before long will not even be found among the ice floes of the Arctic Ocean. All the great land animals are threatened in the same way. One knows the fate of the aurochs and the bison; one can foretell that of the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus and the elephant. Statistics estimate the production of elephant ivory at 800 tons yearly, which is as good as to say that the hunters kill 40,000 elephants in the same time, without counting those who, after being wounded, go off and die afar in the jungle. How distant are we from the Singhalese folk of old times, for whom “the eighteenth science for man was to win the friendship of an elephant”! How distant from the Aryans of India, who appointed for the captive colossus two Brahmins as companions, in order that he might be taught to practice the virtues worthy of his race!

What a contrast there exists between the two kinds of civilisation I had occasion to see one day in a plantation in Brazil. Two bulls, bought at great expense in the Old World, were the pride of the proprietor. One of them, which came from Jersey, was pulling at a chain which passed through his nostrils, bellowing, fuming, tearing the ground with his hoof, thrusting with his horns, and watching his keeper with a wicked eye; the other, a zebu, imported from India, followed us like a dog, with gentle eyes, begging for a caress. We poor ignorant “civilisees”, living in our closed houses, afar from Nature, which alarms us because the sun is too hot or the wind too cold — we have entirely forgotten even the meaning of the festivals which we celebrate, and which, all

⁴ Guepard, the hunting tiger of India, or cheetah.

of them — Christmas, Easter, Rogations, and All-Hallows — were originally festivals of Nature, though Christianity itself does not know it. Do we understand the meaning of the traditions which place the first man in a garden of beauty, where he walks in freedom with all the animals, and which tell us that the “Son of Man” was born on a bed of straw, between the ass and the ox, the two companions of the field-worker?

Nevertheless, though the gulf which separates man from his brethren the animals has widened, and though our direct influence on those species that remain free in Nature’s wilds has diminished, it seems clear that at least a certain progress has been effected, thanks to the more intimate association which has arisen with those domestic animals which are not used for food. No doubt even dogs have been partially corrupted. The majority of them, accustomed like soldiers to blows, have become degraded beings that tremble before the stick, and cringe and crawl under the threats of the master; others, who are taught savagery, become the bulldogs that seize poor folk by the calf of the leg, or leap at the throats of the slaves; and then again “greyhounds in petticoats”⁵ adopt all the vices of their mistresses — greediness, vanity, luxury, and insolence; while the dogs in China, bred for the table, are stupid beyond compare. But the dog that is truly loved, and brought up in generosity, gentleness and nobility of feeling — does he not quite often realise a human or superhuman ideal of devotion and moral greatness?

And cats — who have understood better than dogs how to safeguard their personal independence and originality of character, who are “companions rather than captives” — have they not, too, since the day of primitive wildness in the woods, made advances intellectual and moral which partake of the miraculous? There is not a human sentiment, which on occasion they do not understand or share, not an idea, which they do not divine, not a desire but what they forestall it. The poet sees in them magicians; it is that in fact they do seem at times more intelligent than their human friends, in their presentiment of the future. And such and such “happy family,” exhibited by showmen in the fairs, does it prove to us that rats, mice, guinea pigs and so many other little creatures, only desire to enter, with man, into the great kinship of gladness and kindness? Every prison cell is soon transformed — provided the warders do not impose “good order” — into a school of lower animals, rats and mice, flies and fleas. The story of Pelisson’s spider is well known. The prisoner had begun again to take interest in life, thanks to the little friend whose training he had undertaken; but a guardian of order appears on the scene, and avenging official morality with his boot, crushes the creature which had come to console the unfortunate man!

These facts prove to us the resources which man holds in command for the revival of his influence over all this animated world which now he leaves in the lap of chance, and neglects to associate with his own life. When our civilisation, ferociously individualist as it is, and dividing the world into as many little hostile States as there are separate properties and different family households — when its last bankruptcy shall have been declared, and recourse to mutual help shall have become necessary for the common salvation, when the search for friendship shall have taken the place of the search for wealth — that wealth which, sooner or later, will be sufficiently assured for all; and when the enthusiasm of naturalists shall have revealed to us all that there is of charming, of lovable, of human, and often of more than human, in the nature of the animals, then we shall remember all these species that have been left behind on the forward route, and shall endeavour to make of them, not servants or machines, but veritable companions. The study of primitive man has contributed in a singular degree to our understanding of the “law and order”

⁵ *Les levrettes en panetot.*

man of our own day; the customs of animals will help us to penetrate deeper into the science of life, will enlarge both our knowledge of the world and our love. Let us long for the day when the doe of the forest shall come to meet us, to win our caresses by the look of her dark eyes, and the bird shall perch triumphantly on the shoulder of the loved woman, knowing himself beautiful, and demanding, he also, his part in the kiss of friendship!

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